UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Narratives of the Significance of First Intercourse in Young People's Lives

BY

©

Sandra L. Dika

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

in

Family Life Education

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 1996

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-18252-5

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

LIBRARY RELEASE FORM

Name of Author:	SANDRA LOREE DIKA
Title of Thesis:	NARRATIVES OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRST INTERCOURSE IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES
Degree:	MASTER OF SCIENCE
Year This Degree Granted:	1996

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Sandra Dika
P.O. Box 60310
Edmonton, Alberta
CANADA
T6G 2S6

August 06, 1996
Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Narratives of the Significance of First Intercourse in Young People's Lives** submitted by **Sandra L. Dika** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science** in **Family Life Education**.

Diane K Kieren
Dr. D. Kieren, Supervisor

M Doherty-Poirier
Dr. M. Doherty-Poirier

Dr. J. Ellis

July 8, 1996
Date

Abstract

This narrative inquiry seeks insight into and understanding about the personal significance or meaning of first sexual intercourse for young men and women. Two women; Elle and Aurora; and two men; Luis and Tam; recounted the experience of first intercourse in the context of their life experience. These narratives are re-presented as narrative threads for each person. One central theme for each person was described in relation to these threads: Elle as becoming herself; Aurora as questioning herself; Luis as developing himself, and Tam as revealing himself. Three commonplaces of these narratives of experience were identified for all four people: the three-thread conversation, focusing on sexual development, first intercourse and self-perception; the importance of the relationship with the first intercourse partner; and the anticipation of sexual activity despite negative messages about sexuality. Narrative inquiry was a powerful means for eliciting stories of the significance of first intercourse. Implications for educators, service providers and parents are also discussed. Throughout, the author interprets her journey as a student, researcher and woman in her quest to deepen understanding of this transitional life event.

Acknowledgements

As my research journey comes to a close, I think of the people who have become a part of *my* story, which is very much still a "work in progress". I would like to express my thanks in appreciation of their contributions.

To the four young men and women who shared their stories and their lives with me for validating the power of personal story.

To Dr. Dianne Kieren, my thesis supervisor, for her gentle "nagging" and for understanding when I needed time out from the all-consuming undertaking of narrative research.

To Dr. Maryanne Doherty-Poirier and Dr. Julia Ellis for sharing their time and expertise as committee members.

To my colleagues in the Department of Human Ecology for listening and supporting this project. I would especially like to acknowledge Tracy Salmon, my "twin", for sharing the highs and lows of the past three years.

To the BGOC for local and long distance support, and for helping me redefine friendship.

To Mark, for being there for me while he could.

To my family for emotional and financial support throughout my journey. Their love has always allowed me to pursue anything I choose.

And finally to MAP, who convinced me that caves aren't something to be afraid of. And neither is flying. Te quiero por que te quiero.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

1. *Narrative Beginnings* 1
    - Starting with a Story 1
    - Aphrodite and Me 2
    - Rationale for Narrative Inquiry 5
    - The Language of Narrative 6
    - Concluding Comment 6

2. *Contextualizing My Narrative Representations* 7
    - The Third Person 7
        - Personal Context of Sexual Intercourse for Youth 7
    - The Story of Life 12
    - The First Person 13
        - "The Space Between Us" 13
        - His-stories 14
        - Her-stories 17
        - Our-stories? 22

3. *Creating a Space for Narrative: The Carpenter and the Composer* 25
    - The Carpenter 25
    - The Composer 31
        - The Naive Optimist 32
        - Descent into Darkness 34
        - End of the Tunnel 35
    - Welcome Home 36

4. *The First Time: Narratives of Experience* 37
    - Elle 37
        - "It was a nice first time" 38
        - "I learned so much about myself" 40
        - "I have to go with who I am" 43
        - Becoming Herself 45
    - Aurora 46
        - "I'm not a sexual being anymore" 47
        - ""We were told that it was bad but I'd been looking forward to it for so long" 50
        - "Well, I'd better do it" 51
        - "It's expected of me and I still feel bad" 53
        - Questioning Herself 54
    - Luis 54
        - "Nothing really major has impacted my sexuality"(?) 55
        - "I wanted to share myself with her" 57
        - "I'm not a typical male" 59
        - Developing Himself 61
    - Tam 61
        - "I would call myself a ladies' man" 62

"I loved her, she loved me, there was no way things weren't gonna work out" 66
"Something good's gonna happen because you're a good person" 72
Revealing Himself 75
Commonplaces 76
Three Threads 76
The Second Significance 76
Knowing and Anticipating 77
Definition of "The First Time" 78
Sensitive New Age Guys 78
Connecting Our Stories 78

5. *Re-visiting "Narrative"* 80
Explications 80
Discussion 81
What About the Space? 81
Sexual Meanings 82
In Search of Ourstory 82
Further Research 83
Implications 84
Revisiting My Story: The Metamorphosis of Aphrodite 88

References 90

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate 95

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form 96

Appendix C: Conversation Guide 99

CHAPTER ONE
Narrative Beginnings

> We know ourselves by the stories we tell. Each person is like a tree, with layers marking growth, each having weathered a different year of storms and sun, warm breezes and shaded silences. And like the rings that tell the story of the tree's life, our growth is revealed by stories, by the words we tell ourselves and others about our experiences. We find communion by sharing our stories and discovering similar threads of experience. (Bouris, 1993)

Starting with a Story

How apt the quote from Bouris. As I listen to the stories I tell myself and the stories others told me I have begun to know myself. Hearing myself has been the most difficult part of my research.

Starting with a story is as much about knowing myself as well as allowing the reader to know me. Adults are natural storytellers but we have learned to suppress our stories as a way of knowing because of the theory that knowledge is based on objectivity and generalizability (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

> It is our inward journey that leads us through time - forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling. Each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember, remembering, we discover; and most intently do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Our living experience at those meeting points is one of the charged dramatic fields of fiction. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 83)

As I began to discover the stories of others, I began to remember my own stories. Why is it so hard to remember? Why did I forget? Farwell (1988) reminds us that "without a story we perish...stories define our lives...without stories, our lives would be formless" (p. 29). My life was starting to feel formless. While I was undergoing a period of intense self-scrutiny, I realized that I had been avoiding taking control of my life and my decisions about the future. Telling my story is, in the words of Grumet (1988), a way to impose form on my own chaotic experiences. Hearing and listening to my story is a way to nourish, encourage and sustain myself (Howe, 1984).

A few weeks ago, I wrote in my journal, "although now is a time of introspection for me, it's hard to separate what is my story for my research and what is my lived experience right now". As I look back, I realize that separation of my story and my lived experience is neither necessary nor desirable. Here continues my living story.

Aphrodite and Me

I think I need to start by telling about my sexual self, my beginnings. I have deliberated over this section, writing and re-writing my story as well as myself. Last summer, as I began thinking about how to tell my story, I was introduced to Shinoda Bolen's (1984) Goddesses in Everywoman: A new psychology of women by a close female friend. Although I thought it might be a little too "out there" for me, I read it anyway. I could not put it down! I was intrigued with this way of knowing women. When I began reading the last section on Aphrodite I started to think about myself in relation to my thesis work. I began to re-discover my relationship with the Goddess of Beauty and Love.

I have several sexual memories from my childhood--seeing my cousin's penis, kissing the class cutie in kindergarten, playing doctor with the neighbours. From grades one to three, I spent a lot of time at my friend Marla's house. She had two older sisters with whom I was fascinated. They influenced our play significantly. We always had boyfriends--mine were Luke Duke and Ace Frehley, hers were Bo Duke and Paul Stanley. This was the influence of the sisters. We admired their breasts and we would sleep on our stomachs, praying our buds would sprout. I had some real boyfriends, too. I began riding the school bus near the end of grade three when my family moved to a farm. The two boys I liked happened to ride the same bus as I did. One day, I orchestrated the situation so that I was sitting with one and the other was sitting behind us. I remember telling them where to sit and being quite smug when they did.

I developed quickly, a fact I bemoan when I now see my grade six body in the mirror. Shinoda Bolen (1986) says that Aphrodites are often early maturers. I had always noticed boys, but when I transferred to the high school in grade seven, there were bigger boys to look at! I had a crush on a grade twelve guy, as did several of my friends, and we would spy on these guys at lunch break. One of my friends had a brother three years older. We would get together at her place, about five or six giggling 12 and 13-year-olds, while he would have several of his friends over. They would flirt with us. We felt lucky and attractive! That Christmas, my friend's brother kissed me under the mistletoe in our classroom. I was ecstatic! I remember writing about it in my diary.

First date? Grade 8. I had glasses AND braces and I thought I was pretty ugly. I saw "Return of the Jedi" at the town theatre with Todd, a family friend. Mom dropped me off-- I don't even know if she knew I had a date. I don't remember much of that movie to this day, not because of any hot kissing or heavy petting, but because I was paralyzed by knowing he was next to me. Todd and I ended up being pre-sex lab partners from that point until grade 11, whenever he didn't have a girlfriend. I always thought he would be the first one. We never did have sex.

In grade ten, all of the older girls used to bug me. I guess they didn't like me on their turf. I wasn't really on their turf, but rumours run rampant in small town Alberta. I was easy to hurt. I remember one incident in particular. It was the Monday after a huge weekend party, at which I was discovered "making out" with one of the most sought after guys in school. He was my age but girls one and two years older than him were very interested. Cindy was the ringleader of a group of girls who relished in intimidating anyone who seemed shy or vulnerable. She called out to me in the hallway "Are you a virgin?", emphasizing the word "virgin" with a Ukrainian accent. I felt everyone had heard. I wanted to scream, "Yes!". I wanted to slap her round face and knock off her fat glasses. Instead, I turned red and continued toward the washroom, where I began to cry. There were several incidents like this where Cindy or others in her group would say something insulting as I walked by. Whether I ignored them or attempted a response, they would break into delighted laughter.

I had a few short term interests in my high school years. There were a lot of guys interested in me. These mini-relationships would start with flirting and sometimes result in kissing and petting. After an encounter they would ignore me and become interested in someone else. It was very distressing for me because even in our short relationships I would develop feelings for them. This was the only way I could be physical in the first place. That, and I very much wanted to be liked. I was more concerned about this with males than with females. I cannot say for sure, but I think this had a lot to do with my feelings that nothing I could do would please my father.

My first real love, and my first lover, was a really nice guy--the captain of the basketball team! Then, I wasn't too much of a risk taker. I didn't "like" Daniel before I knew he liked me. When I found out he liked me, I assessed the situation. Criterion number one was met--he liked me. Criterion number two--he was nice to me. Criterion number three--he was decent looking. Okay, we're going out. After several months of patient, yet persistent pleading, I agreed to have sex with him. I remember him saying, "I'll only put it in once", as if that wouldn't really count. "It" finally happened on the night of his graduation. After the dancing, and before the party, we went back to his mom's place. I remember most vividly him putting on two condoms, just to be even safer, as I was terrified of becoming pregnant. I had mixed feelings. I knew that as his girlfriend this was something I had to do. I also had a feeling of love, of sharing myself with someone who cared for me. Afterwards, we went to the party. As we ambled through the drunken crowd, I remember wondering whether they could tell that I wasn't a virgin. It was important to me at the time. Several weeks later, as I was expecting my period, I felt both fear and excitement at the possibility I could be pregnant. As I shared this information with my friends, "Ohmigod, I finally got it!" I knew that I was now a real woman.

Because we were not into the party scene that dominated so many of our peers' lives we created our own little world, which was much more "adult". Our relationship continued throughout my final year of high school. Physical sex became a very important part of our connectedness. I remember thinking about Daniel as an Adonis, which I find interesting now as I describe my identification with the Aphrodite archetype. I wanted to please him sexually and I wanted him to love me. The relationship wasn't *that* lopsided, though. He wanted me to love him, too, and for awhile we were "in love".

We parted tearfully the next September, vowing to stay together while I was at University. I don't remember how far ahead we were thinking. I moved onto a residence floor with forty other young students. I knew after the first week that my life was going to change. I was no longer under the microscope of small town Alberta. Although I was only one in 30,000, I met several young men and women with whom I shared similar interests and backgrounds. When Daniel came to visit at the end of September he was surprised at how many people I knew. When I said, "Hi!" to some male students in the cafeteria, his "Who are they?" betrayed a sense of jealousy. This continued to be an issue in our telephone conversations. By Christmas, our relationship was no longer. I decided to focus on other aspects of my life instead.

My next two relationships had a similar pattern. They were both "summer loves" and "fixer-uppers". I thought I could help them change themselves. This wasn't arrogance but the desire to help. Nevertheless, these relationships did not work out. Here was Aphrodite in action--engaging in intense relationships, "moving from one to another as well as being engrossed in...creative work" (Shinoda Bolen, 1986, p. 242). I was searching for the one I could fly with, my co-pilot, and kept searching.

It was during my most recent relationship that I came to identify myself as more than "sexy", more than someone's girlfriend. My adoption of a self-empowering attitude both helped and harmed our relationship. When our relationship dissolved, I knew that my changed attitude was a factor. I think he was still in love with the old Sandra, and I was not her anymore. I had also found my co-pilot, in the most unexpected way. It was a while before I could get the courage to end my relationship with him. I am not satisfied with the way I handled the situation, but I know I made the right decision. Although I was not closing the door to Aphrodite, I was rewriting her role in my life. I still am.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry

I entered the Family Life Education program with an interest in adolescent contraceptive use. As I explored this area, I became familiar with the research literature on adolescent sexual behaviour. The research has tended to be event-driven, focusing on worrisome trends in adolescent sexual behaviour, like the declining age of first intercourse and increased sexual activity in adolescence. These profiles of the adolescent population have resulted in a loss of individual experiences and perspectives, and contributed to the depersonalization of the experience of sexual intercourse and an avoidance of the exploration of the potential role the personal elements of the experience might have in delaying or precipitating sexual involvement.

We have only a minimum of knowledge about motivation for sexual intercourse, feelings about sexual intercourse and sexual meanings. Many questions remain unanswered. Why do adolescents continue having sexual intercourse in the face of so many potential risks? Why do they begin having intercourse in the first place? What does "being ready" mean for them? What significance does sex have for them? These questions cannot be answered by filling in items on a questionnaire. The voices of young men and women have not been heard. These questions, by their nature, beg to hear those voices, and "hear deeply" (Griffin, 1992 in Bouris, 1994). Young people must be given the opportunity to tell their stories about the significance that sexual intercourse has for them, particularly about the significance of the first time they have intercourse. The first time is important to focus on as a starting point of sexual activity. The purpose of my research is to uncover the significance, or life meaning, of the first sexual intercourse for young people and to contribute to our limited knowledge about the personal context of youth sexual behavior.

The central question I explored through narrative inquiry can be stated as:

What is the personal significance of first intercourse for young men and women?

The Language of Narrative

I do not propose to operationalize definitions for the terms "narrative" and "story". However, I would like to explicate the meanings these terms hold for me. Narrative is story. Story is narrative. They are both the method and the phenomenon--the subject of the research and the mode whereby it is fully developed. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) differentiate story and narrative in this way:

> Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon story and the inquiry narrative. Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (p. 416)

I implement the designations of story and narrative in a similar manner. This usage allows us to develop an understanding of a common language for reading and writing narrative.

In this thesis I inquire into the significance of first sexual intercourse in young men's and women's lives. I refer to first sexual intercourse as "first intercourse" or "first time". "The first time" has been commonly understood to refer to first intercourse for at least the past 20 years (Fleming, 1975; Montpetit, 1995a/1995b). I have chosen to continue that use for the readers' ease as well as for my own comfort.

Concluding Comment

As I wrote this chapter, I realized just how personal narrative research can be. I adjusted my level of self-exposure several times. I have come to a point where I am comfortable with what I am revealing about myself and how I am revealing it. This study evolves out of my experiences and the meanings I have about sex and sexuality. My narrative beginnings make some of these experiences and meanings known to the reader. My hope is that my self-revelation and inquiry into the life significance of first intercourse for young people will stimulate thought and dialogue about the interconnections of the first time, future sexual relationships, sexual functioning and self-esteem.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualizing My Narrative Representations

> The word context literally means to weave together, to twine, to connect. This interrelatedness creates the webs of meaning within which humans act.
> (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 19 in Huber, 1992)

From these narrative beginnings I continued my research journey. But the journey did not start at the beginnings. I began by reading to provide a context for my research question. I undertook an extensive literature review of youth sexual behaviour including first intercourse. At this stage of my journey my research story consisted of finding out everything I could about first intercourse. After I met and shared conversations with my student participants I began to re-discover my own stories about my sexuality. I revised my research story and focused on exploring literature to contextualize my narrative "beginnings" and create meaning for my experiences. In literature, context is defined as the parts before and after a passage that give that passage meaning. In my research journey the re-writing of my research story has provided context for my Goddess story. This thesis was constructed over time and I have decided to share both my original third person and revised first person contextualizations, in the form of literature reviews, to allow the reader to understand the temporal sense of narrative research.

The Third Person

I call this original review of literature "the third person". The author is finding out everything about first intercourse and writing a traditionally formatted literature review. It also symbolizes the time before "I" came into my research. Although I had recognized that I was "not...a scientist in a lab coat but...a listener...a collaborator" (Project, 1995, p. 7) it seemed I still thought of myself as "the author". I have italicized the excerpt from my original review to illustrate the feeling I have when I read it now: the feeling that someone else is telling it.

~

Personal Context of Sexual Intercourse for Youth

If we advocate the view of sexuality as encompassing all aspects of maleness and femaleness, understanding of the personal context of sexual intercourse is critical. Knowledge about youth sexuality can be viewed as a puzzle. Some of the pieces have been found but they have not been put together. A tiny corner of the puzzle pieces *together our limited knowledge about motivation for sexual intercourse, feelings about sexual intercourse, and sexual meaning.*

Motivation.

Little is known about the motivation for sexual intercourse in youth. What is known is found in the few studies on youth sexual decision-making and reasons for having and avoiding sexual intercourse (Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Christopher & Cate, 1984; Christopher & Cate, 1985; Lally & Maddock, 1994; Leigh, 1989; Whitley, 1988). Decision-making about sexual intercourse may indirectly reveal motivations for engaging or not engaging in intercourse. Reasons for having and avoiding sexual intercourse more directly indicate youth motivation for sexual intercourse.

Researchers have developed models for adolescent sexual decision-making as well as examined the influence that particular factors have on decision-making for first intercourse and subsequent adolescent sexual activity. Sexual decision-making models have been developed for use in sexuality education classes. The work done by Juhasz (1975) has resulted in a model of sexual decision making. The model consists of six questions about decisions related to consequences of sexual intercourse. Decision-making about sexual intercourse has been looked at in two ways; anticipated influences and identified influences. Physical arousal, relationship with partner, and circumstance have been identified as the three main factors virgins anticipate will influence their decision to engage in first intercourse (Christopher & Cate, 1985). Females were influenced more by the relationship factor than males. Prior to this study, the same two researchers (Christopher & Cate, 1984) found that four basic factors were identified as being influential in the decision to have intercourse for the first time with a particular partner: Positive Affect/Communication, Obligation/Pressure, Arousal/Receptivity, and Circumstantial. Females considered Positive Affect/Communication to be more important than males, whereas males considered Obligation/Pressure to be more important in their decision.

The research on reasons for having and avoiding sexual intercourse provides some insight into motivation for sexual intercourse as well. Some studies found that males most often have intercourse for physical pleasure whereas females give love-related reasons (Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Whitley, 1988). Other studies do not support a significant gender difference. Leigh (1989) found that heterosexual males *and females engaged in intercourse primarily for pleasure and to express emotional closeness, and a more recent study found that both males and females rated affection and communication as their top two reasons for having intercourse (Lally & Maddock, 1994). Reasons not to have intercourse show similar results. In Carroll et al.'s (1985) study, females refused sex mainly for lack of love/commitment, whereas males said that they would never neglect an opportunity. Gender differences are not so evident in Leigh's (1989) study; both males and females rated fear of AIDS as their primary reason for not having intercourse (Leigh, 1989).*

Research on motivation for intercourse reflects the assumption that motivation is contained solely within reasons for sex. There is a gap in knowledge about how meanings attached to sexual intercourse play a role in motivation. This knowledge may contribute to the construction of the puzzle of youth sexuality.

Emotional reactions to first intercourse.

Research on emotional reactions to first intercourse has been both descriptive and explanatory. Some research has described accounts of first intercourse and the feelings associated with the event. Thompson (1990) interviewed of hundreds of young women and identified two stories about first intercourse: painful, boring, and disappointing (Story 1); and curious, desirable, and pleasurable (Story 2). Gender differences in reactions to first intercourse have been described as well. In general, males experience more positive reactions than females after first intercourse (DeLamater, 1987).

Some research has examined the influence of parents and peers on reactions to first intercourse. The results of research that investigates the influence of parents on affective reactions to sexual initiation is inconclusive. Females experienced negative affect (Kelley, 1979), guilt (Darling, Davidson, & Passarello, 1992), pain, and boredom (Thompson, 1990) when parents' norms and communication reflected negative attitudes toward sexuality. Weis' (1983) research found no relationship between parental factors and emotional reactions. The paucity of research that examines the influence of peers on affective reactions to first intercourse is surprising. Weis (1983) concluded that peer attitudes, behavior, and discussions had no direct influence on affective reactions.

A couple of researchers have looked at the influence of personal attitude and situational factors of first intercourse on reactions to the event. Females who reported liberal sexual attitudes experienced less anxiety after first intercourse than females who reported more conservative attitudes (Weis, 1983; Schwartz, 1993). Specific aspects of the situation of the first intercourse have demonstrated an influence on affective reactions to sexual initiation. Perception of partner as gentle, loving, and considerate, a spontaneous first intercourse, and the experience of orgasm during first intercourse was associated with pleasure for females (Weis, 1983). Females reported less pleasure when they experienced pain (Darling, Davidson, & Passarello, 1992; Weis, 1983) and when they used drugs or alcohol (Weis, 1983). Males' drug and alcohol use was associated with negative affect as well (Darling, Davidson, & Passarello, 1992). The influence of non coital sexual experience seems to play a role in reaction to first intercourse. Women with more heterosexual experience (i.e. kissing, petting) before coital initiation experienced more pleasure than those with less experience (Weis, 1983).

The research on affective reactions is biased toward females' reactions, which may suggest the assumption that there is not a need to study the experience of first intercourse for males. It is inappropriate to assume that males do not have a varied and unique experience of first intercourse. The male perspective must be heard. Also there is a gap in research on the relationship of the difference between the expected experience and the actual experience to emotional reactions.

Sexual meaning.

Scientific attention to different aspects of the meaning of sex is rather recent. The research to date has focused on the meaning of sexual behavior for adults. Most interest in the meaning of sex has been in the context of marriage, and has found that men separate sex and love whereas women believe they go together (Glass & Wright, 1992; Julien, Bouchard, Gagnon, & Pomerleau, 1992). Maddock (1988) has developed the Sexual Meaning Survey to measure "meanings attributed to sexuality" (Lally & Maddock, 1994). The survey has two parts: a fifty-item semantic differential on the stimulus concept of "sex" and a list of ten possible reasons for sex. In a study using the survey, Lally and Maddock (1994) found that engaged couples had less discrepant *meaning scores than randomly paired men and women. Other data is available, but has not yet been analyzed (Maddock, personal communication).*

Quantitative investigation in this area has assumed that the meaning of sex can be measured. One might ask, however, whether reasons for having sex and responses on semantic differentials can be equated with sexual meanings. There has been a bias toward research on sexual meaning of adults, usually married couples. There appears to be no research that has examined sexual meanings of unmarried persons, including youth. Investigation into the meanings attached to sexuality are important in understanding sexual attitudes and behaviours, and in turn, developing educational curricula that encourage the adoption of healthy attitudes and behaviours.

Summary

Although existing research offers a more personal glimpse into youth sexual activity and first intercourse, there is still a deficit in our understanding of what the experience is really like. We can speculate from the research what the meaning of first intercourse for youth might entail, but we do not know for certain. The experience of males has remained largely uninvestigated. Despite the belief that first intercourse is an important and transitional event in sexual development, the significance or meaning of the first sexual intercourse in human life has been ignored except for a few pop culture studies (see for example Bouris, 1994). The focus on identifying factors which precipitate or prevent early intercourse has moved researchers away from description and understanding of first intercourse from an insider perspective. Lack of attention to the subjective aspects of youth sexual experience highlights a serious gap in understanding of youth sexual behavior (Brick, 1989). Qualitative research in this area is virtually nonexistent. It may be the missing link for better understanding the significance of first intercourse.

~

As I re-visited my personal stories of sex and sexuality this third person contextualization became less meaningful--I could not connect to statistics about "most women"--and before I re-visited my stories my life felt out of my control. The connection between life and story was beginning to make itself known to me. I needed to create a new context for my personal stories and my research. With what would I weave them? To what would I connect them? I began to seek out, more intensely than ever before, literature that concentrated on the personal experience of first intercourse, stories of the first time lived and told. This time my definition of key literature was less narrow: It did not have to be published in research journals. I read research-based stories of first intercourse as well as literary representations of first intercourse. I read a much smaller number of "studies" or stories but the web of meaning they created was stronger. I could connect to these personal stories.

In the third person, I defined "personal context" as motivation, feelings and meaning. Even then, it seemed odd to separate and measure these qualitative concepts. As I sought and found stories of the first time I wondered if it was necessary or appropriate to separate the concepts. Stories about life experiences preserve their meaning when they are kept whole. I realized that an exploration of the relationship between life and story could help weave a context, or create meaning for our stories of the first time.

The Story of Life

The focus of this study is to develop an understanding of the significance of lived experience (first intercourse) to young people as it is represented in personal narratives. This method presupposes a connection between life and story. The life-story relationship is commonly seen as somewhat of a chicken and egg scenario.

> The relation between life and story usually is envisaged in one of the following two ways: On the one hand human life is seen as something that can be depicted in stories...On the other hand, stories are regarded as ideals that we try to live up to...In the first case life is the example that literature is supposed to follow; in the second case literature gives us the example according to which we should live. Common to both is the presupposition that life and story can be distinguished from one another in such a way that they can be described independently. (Widdershoven, 1993, p. 1)

Alternatively, within the movement of philosophical hermeneutics, life and story are seen as internally related. The implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories: From a hermeneutic point of view, human life is interpreted in stories (Widdershoven, 1993, p. 2).

The tradition of narrative inquiry shares this hermeneutic perspective on the relationship between life and story. Narrative inquiry is "the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 24). The study of narrative is the study of the ways in which humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). People are living their stories in a continuous "experiential text" and also telling their stories in words (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In sum, "narrative imitates life; life imitates narrative" (Bruner, 1987, p. 15).

The First Person

The meaning of life events does not exist independently of the stories that are told about them (Widdershoven, 1993). Bouris (1993) echoes, "We know ourselves by the stories we tell". Existing narratives of first intercourse, in the form of research or literature text, compose another thread in the web of meaning for understanding its significance in our lives.

"The Space Between Us"

Josselson (1992, p. 74) talks about passionate experience and physical sexuality as "the most powerful medium for the interplay of connection, apartness, and reconnection", a way to make "(t)he space between you and me...disappear". Although gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviour were de-emphasized in the 1980's (DeLamater, 1986) writers and researchers acknowledge that there is a space between men and women (Rubin, 1991; Rubin, 1984; Sprecher, Barbee & Schwarz, 1995). In exploring this "space", I believe we can shed light on the differences between men's and women's stories of first intercourse.

Josselson (1992) identifies four interrelated gender differences in the way men and women organize their relational lives. First, men connect on more abstract and conceptual terms while women experience relatedness in a more affective realm. As a result of this, men define themselves as more separate from others and at a greater emotional distance from them than do women. Because men do not experience the emotional connection that women do, they must define their role through action. Thirdly, then, men know themselves through their actions (doing) while women know themselves through others (being). These doing and being orientations mean that "sexuality for men is more tangible, visible, urgent, and guiding, while for women it is more internal, private, malleable" (p. 228)

I contemplated the effect of my gender on my research experience throughout this study. I come to this research as a woman with my female experience of sexuality. Josselson (1992) sums up my feelings nicely: "I...must acknowledge that my gender prohibits me from fully understanding male sexuality...our answers to questions about how the genders differ...will always be distorted, filtered through the gender-lens of the speaker." (p. 230) And so both his-stories and her-stories of the same experience, first sexual intercourse, are born.

His-stories

> ...(A)s men described their adolescent relationships, they began to mention females in a kind of offhand way. Very few mentioned particular persons, but most could recollect important experiences from boyhood like first intercourse... (Phillips, 1986, p. 324)

Stories about "doing it" are told typically by men. His-stories of the first time focus on the "doing", or the description of the experience, and the interpretation of the "doing". I accessed stories that seemed to centre around the narrative threads or themes of *doing it* (achievement) and *doing it right* (performance anxiety). These threads are neither exclusive nor unidimensional. I would like to describe how I came to understand men's experience of first intercourse through these stories.

Having sexual intercourse for the first time is a very important achievement in a boy's life. I use the word "boy" because the first time is still very much associated with becoming a man; achieving manhood; especially in the research literature (Doyle, 1995; Fleming, 1975; Godfrey, 1995; Hass, 1979; Rubin, 1991; Swede, 1995). I was somewhat surprised about this because through my own experience with men, I had sensed that the "rite of passage" story was more myth than reality. Rubin (1991) asked hundreds of men (and women) between thirteen and forty-eight about their sexuality, including their first time if they had experienced it.

> No matter what their age, the men construed it in the context of our social definitions of masculinity. They talked about "crossing a great divide", they said they felt a "burden was lifted", the "pressure was off", a "hurdle was gotten over." They characterized the experience as an "important achievement", a "landmark achievement." For them, it was a rite of passage, a crucial step on the road to manhood - a step in which they exulted, even if they didn't fully enjoy the experience itself. (p. 43)

In Hass' (1979) qualitative study of teenage sexuality, male teens talked about being proud and experiencing a sense of accomplishment, of feeling more like a man. One sixteen-year-old captures this sense: "It was like I had become a man and I wanted to tell everyone about it." (p. 73). This feeling is richly described in Swede's (1995) "true" story, It's Always the First Time. Caught up in the passionate emotion that followed Kennedy's assassination, this twenty-two-year-old became a man.

> In no time at all, we were on my bed, and somehow, I don't recall the steps, we were out of our clothes. I remember the thrill of feeling her body against mine;

> our skins crackled with electricity. Before I had time to think about it, I was inside her. It was much better than I had ever imagined - it was indescribable. Time didn't exist anymore, so I can't tell you how long it lasted. But when it was over, I was the happiest I had ever been. We lay in each other's arms until the room was pitch black...I was finally a man! (Swede, 1995, p. 80-81)

Why is the sense of accomplishment so strong for men? The pressure to *do it* is felt by many males (Hass, 1979; Rubin, 1991), whether such pressure is of the "wink, wink, nudge, nudge" variety or is more overt in nature, and having intercourse can relieve this pressure.

> *17-year-old:* There is a definite pressure to get laid before you get out of high school. Fucking for the first time relieved that pressure and allowed me to have a better relationship with girls. (Hass, 1979, p. 15)

While Hass (1979) and Rubin (1991) included only short excerpts of men's stories to illustrate their interpretations about pressure, untouched stories of the experience provided me with a different context.

> Remember when we first started eighth grade and we ate lunch in McDonald's one day and we made a bet? We bet a Big Mac on which one of us would lose their virginity first. Do you remember? Well, buddy, looks like you owe the old Shawn-meister a burger. When Jimi Hendrix sings, "Are You Experienced?", I can now answer YES!! (Godfrey, 1995, p. 34)

I found it curious that none of the male storytellers in Montpetit's (1995a; 1995b) two volume anthology The First Time spoke primarily of pressure or its influence on their choice to have intercourse. I have three different hypotheses about this incongruence: a) that oral tradition exaggerates the pressure experienced by men; b) that the storytellers were not asked to tell about pressure to do it, and therefore did not; or c) that the storytellers de-emphasized pressure to avoid having to talk about failure. These alternative views may be inadequate in that it may be d) all of the above, or e) none of the above. In any case, the pressure story is not a total myth: "... fewer social restraints on males help generate more direct and less ambiguous pressures from peers to be sexually active..." (Hass, 1979, p. 82).

Virginal males are derogated by their classmates, male and female, with the labels of "nerd," "wimp" or "queer" (Rubin, 1991). As a result of peer and societal pressure to do it, males have intensified anxieties about *doing it right*.

> *25-year-old:* ...I knew it was going to happen. I was scared at first; I was afraid I wouldn't know what to do or I'd do something wrong. (Rubin, 1991, p. 42)

As well, males voice feelings of inadequacy about their efforts.

> *17-year-old:* I felt inadequate. I wasn't able to last long. I felt a little rejected and guilty because I was satisfied and I hadn't satisfied her. (Hass, 1979, p. 79)

The observable effects of anxiety and feelings of inadequacy or failure are chronicled quite explicitly in one of The First Time (Montpetit, 1995a) collection of stories. It is important to note that this excerpt comes from a story of a man who is seeing a psychologist about an erectile dysfunction.

> On our third date, I made my move, and Joan didn't try to stop me. We kept going until we were both naked on my bed and she wanted me to enter her. Then my erection wilted. I could have crawled away and died, but Joan was very supportive - she told me not to worry, that it happened to lots of guys. She even tried to get me excited again, but instead of relaxing, I started to wonder how many guys she was talking about. *Is that why you lost your erection?* That and the fear I wouldn't satisfy her. Also fear that my penis might be too small. *Is it small?* No, it's average. *Why did you think it was too small, then?* You know how men are. They're always joking about size. Also, some of the novels I had read stressed the importance of a big cock, pardon the language. *Most males go through this anxiety.* (Swede, 1995, p. 76)

Stories focussing on performance anxiety, like those about pressure, are more evident in the research literature. Anxiety in literary representations played a background role and was not nearly as distressing. In fact, it was even humourous!

> We both mistakenly assumed that once we had rid ourselves of our clothes, instinct would kick in automatically, and we would do whatever it was that nature intended. At that point, however, we just gawked at the condom...We tried several ways of attaching the condom in place - we did manage to roll it over the head of my penis, but that was as far as we went...Unfortunately, the condom refused to stay on, and neither of us proved intelligent enough to handle the mystery. After a number of unsuccessful tries, Sonja, my penis and I were tired and frustrated, giddy and laughing like the incompetent children we were. (Kinsella, 1995, p. 60-61)

> Just at the point where I slid into her, she started laughing...I noticed she wasn't looking at me, that her eyes were peering over my shoulder...She was looking at us in her dresser mirror. There was the reflection of Lisa, spread eagle on her bed, with me laying on top of her with my bare butt stuck up in the air. We looked so stupid...So I started laughing, too. A fit. Five minutes later, we were still laughing so hard we couldn't breathe. (Godfrey, 1995, p. 45-46)

Again, the explanation for this discontinuity may be one or a combination of factors. Rather than try to identify a particular set of factors, I prefer to see the stories as a rare glimpse into the way men interpret their sexual experiences.

The strongest narrative thread reflected in the first person literature was men's sense of achievement related to first intercourse. The other threads, of pressure and anxiety, are evident, though not as strong. One might wonder whether there is that little variability in men's interpretation of sexual initiation and experience of sexuality in general or whether men's stories have been silenced or untold. I believe the latter. Phillips (1986) asserts that "the premise that men have been well studied is untenable" (p. 321). With respect to the representation of first intercourse in research and popular literature, Phillips may be right. I noted a paucity of *accessible* insight into this experience for men. Sometimes I felt that research was almost cursory in its inclusion of men. Earlier in my study, I suggested that the lack of research on men's experience may indicate a general assumption "that there is not a need to study the experience of first intercourse for males... that males do not have a varied and unique experience of first intercourse. The male perspective must be heard" (Proposal, 1995, p. 8). One might argue, in the vein of Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), that our knowledge about sexuality and close relationships is based on his-story, that primarily men have authored this story in their roles as researchers, educators and politicians. I will not explore this debate further here, save to say that by including both his-story and her-story I hope to weave a more comprehensive web of meaning for my study of the experience of first intercourse.

Her-stories

> One of the most significant stories a woman can tell is the experience of her first sexual intercourse. (Bouris, 1994, p. 9)

Women's stories about first intercourse reflect our being orientation. Men talk about doing "it" (sexual intercourse), whereas women talk about losing "it" (virginity). All women talk about "losing" their virginity but this term takes on slightly different meanings for each woman. Within this century, women's "...virginity was transformed from a treasure to be safeguarded to a problem to be solved" (Rubin, 1991, p. 46). Women's stories of the first time reflect this change in the view of their virginal status. I noted, and identified with, three main narrative threads emerging out of the research literature and literary representations: *giving it*, *sharing it* and *losing it*. These threads are made of the same fibre and they weave an interesting cloth.

Some women tell about *giving* their virginity to a man (Bouris, 1994; Hass, 1979). Women who came to adolescence in the late 1950s and early 1960s were taught to save themselves for marriage (Bouris, 1994; Rubin, 1991).

> *52-year-old:* I'm from a bygone era. I lost my virginity to my husband on my wedding night. I ... grew up hearing sermons and Sunday-school lessons about 'saving yourself' for your husband and not being 'damaged goods'. (Bouris, 1994, p. 25)

> *66-year-old:* I was fortunate enough to lose my virginity in a traditional, old-fashioned way - to my husband! We were so in love (he passed away recently), and the consummation of our marriage was a priceless moment that will always be imprinted as one of my fondest memories of him. (Bouris, 1994, p. 30)

Not surprisingly, most *giving it* stories in the research literature were narrated by older women. Younger women also talked about saving their virginity, but for the "right person" or until they were "in love".

> *17-year-old:* I was in love with the guy I lost my virginity to, so I wasn't upset about it. I think if I hadn't cared about the guy so much, I would have regretted it. (Hass, 1979, p. 74)

Giving it stories focus on the suitability of the receiver of the gift. This thread is not nearly as identifiable in Rubin's (1991) large study or in the aforementioned anthology of first time stories (Montpetit, 1995a; Montpetit, 1995b). This absence in Rubin's (1991) work may be due to the age of her participants (between thirteen and forty-eight). The absence of this narrative thread in Rubin (1991) and the literary representations actually does not surprise me. Montpetit (1995a) explains that in spite of the so-called generation gap, the most important aspects of first time stories, the actual feelings and emotions, remain timeless. I read the *giving it* theme as a recognizable sub-text in both the *sharing it* and *losing it* stories as well as my own story. I felt it was worthy of mention for these reasons.

Another group of women, young and old, talk about *sharing it* and tell about the special experience of the first time as something shared and romantic or pleasurable. Some stories told of the first time as a "promising beginning" (Thompson, 1990, p. 355).

> Dear Diary, I DID IT! The first part was every single word for wonderful. The second part? Well, the earth didn't move. Waves didn't crash against the shore. Fireworks didn't explode. (But we *did* see a shooting star. Which I took to be a sign.)... . So, there's a difference between inside and outside. So now I know. And now I think it wasn't a matter of first part and second part, better and

> worse, right and wrong. Every moment was part of the whole. (Lawson, 1995, pp. 111, 122-123)
>
> Oh, well, it didn't live up to everything that the romances say it will, but it's worth it. It was fun. I was definitely going to try it again. (Thompson, 1990, p. 356)

Some lucky women experienced physical pleasure, and an extremely lucky few, orgasm, along with the romance.

> *17-year-old:* In my ideas about premarital sex, I made a resolution to myself that I would not get very physically involved with someone whom I didn't love. With that in mind, when I first had sexual intercourse, I *was* in love and it was very emotionally and physically satisfying. (Hass, 1979, p. 74)
>
> *60-year-old:* We knew it was going to happen, and he'd bought condoms. For four years on and off, I'd been dating a fellow student - a class ahead of me, son of a professor - at a small church-affiliated college. I was twenty-one. We were comfortable enough with each other, but we had always stopped just painfully short of intercourse until after we'd graduated. We were sober - and ready. The coupling, after some juicy foreplay, took place in his mother's car in a farmer's field near my hometown, which was ten miles from our college campus. The rubber held. My orgasm was a whole body experience, and I felt great. (Bouris, 1994, p. 154)

The most obvious difference between *giving it* and *sharing it* is the woman's inclusion of herself and her desire in her story. Pleasure or romance narrators seem to "...understand that they have a right to consult their own desire in deciding whether...to have sex..." (Thompson, 1990, p. 355).

> What is my mother going to say? What will she do? What if I became pregnant? I knew I was certainly going to be more prepared in the future. And then a voice in my head said *To hell with them all.* I immediately felt whole, and free, and wonderful. *I don't care who knows*, I thought, *I don't care if everybody knows. I love Ken and he loves me.* I experienced no shame, just joy. "Joy!" I shouted as I ran down the path. (Brissett, 1995, p. 51)

The most often told stories by women about the first time are about *losing it.* I puzzled initially over the usefulness of the term "losing your virginity".

> **lose** (vt.) **1** to become unable to find/ **2** to have taken away by accident, death, removal etc./ **3** to fail to keep/ **4** to fail to see, hear, or understand/ **5** to fail to have, get, etc./ **6** to fail to win/ **7** to cause the loss of/ **8** to wander from (one's way, etc.)/ **9** to squander/

This thread, along with the multi-textured meaning of loss, runs through her-story of first intercourse. Narrations about pain, confusion, giving in and violation reflect the sense of loss some women feel; loss of virginity, of self and of control.

Pain is a large part of the lore of teenage sexuality, so much so that girls' own stories about pain increase their fear of sex (Thompson, 1990). The physical pain is often described in relation to the size of the entering penis.

> There was no way in the world the thing would ever fit. I, who had trouble inserting a tampon, was supposed to accommodate *that*?...Women deliver babies that are bigger than that, I told myself as he fumbled around. It always hurts at first, but you get used to it, I told myself as he found what he was looking for. Just hang on and it'll get better, I told myself as he began wiggling furiously. (Blakeslee, 1995, p. 62)

This young woman describes the internal dialogue and the disengagement that accompany pain during sex. I could identify with the scripts that were running through her head as ones I had heard in my youth.

Disengagement or confusion is also evident in the stories of women who say that first intercourse "just happened."

> I tell you, I don't know why or how I did it. Maybe I just did it unconsciously. (Thompson, 1990, p. 343)

These women describe a lack of understanding about what happened or what they actually did by having intercourse. This feeling borders on disbelief for some.

> Now I sit here, wondering what's next. Wondering what happened and why I am unable to understand how this can be such a momentous event when it doesn't feel as if anything really happened. Except it has, but I'm not sure exactly what it is. Did I or didn't I? (Kessler, 1995, p. 105)

Not knowing and not understanding how to interpret the first time portrays the sense of loss that some women feel. Unlike the women who shared their virginity, these women do not express a sense of themselves and their desire.

Women talk about giving in to pressure to have intercourse (Bouris, 1994; Rubin, 1991). This is yet another loss, of self and of control over the situation. Although not wanting to, they give in to please their peers, and most often, their partners.

> *14-year-old:* I was afraid, but I loved him. I knew how badly he wanted to do it, and there are so many girls who'll do it with him, so I finally decided it was okay. (Rubin, 1991, p. 51)
>
> *21-year-old:* Finally, one day when we were alone in his room, he asked me again. Because I was scared of him and no one else was home, I just gave in. I didn't enjoy it at all. It hurt mostly, and I just lay there. (Bouris, 1994, p. 51)

The sub-text of not trusting oneself, as well as issues of power and coercion, are evident to me in these narrations.

Stories of physical and emotional pain were intensified for women who experienced sexual violation or coercion. Many women do not label their experience as sexual assault, but their stories tell of the profound effect on their sexuality, their identity and their self-confidence (Bouris, 1994).

> The term 'losing your virginity' seems like such a joke to me, probably because mine was rudely interrupted when at age three my stepfather started putting his dick in my mouth. It continued until age seven, but I'm not sure if that's when it stopped because my memory has failed me from that point onward. (Bouris, 1994, p. 111)

> The man who used to rape me is dead. There will be no trial, no investigation, no interrogation. Nothing more will ever come of this. There will be no public acknowledgment that a crime ever took place. Nor will I receive any kind of apology. I am at once both disappointed and relieved. There was never any evidence to begin with. It would only have been my word against his. And now his words have run out, his voice drowned. Only one version of the truth remains. I may never be proven right, but at least now I can never be proven wrong. I am free. Free at last. But free from what? (Stephens, 1995, pp. 65-66)

Some women had their first sexual intercourse as teenagers with men who were older, who had some authority or power over them.

> *31-year-old:* Then one day it just happened. He was all over me before I knew it, and I felt completely out of control. I didn't feel like I had much choice. I didn't feel like I was raped exactly, but I felt like I didn't have the choice to say no. (Rubin, 1991, p. 56)

Other women were sexually assaulted by a boyfriend or an acquaintance.

> I was just really stunned. Uhm, probably if I would have had my eyes opened, I would have realized it was going to happen, it was gonna...He was over here once and my parents weren't home and I didn't realize basically what I got myself into. I don't think I was emotionally capable of handling it at the time....I got real mad at him but...he'll always be special to me. (Thompson, 1990, p. 346)

I experienced the most acute sense of loss when reading these stories. As a volunteer at a sexual assault agency, I have first hand knowledge of the devastating effects of sexual abuse and assault.

I was not surprised by the myriad of stories and the multi-layered themes. These stories are like second nature to me: some I have lived and some I have heard as part of the oral tradition about women's sexuality. Although this made it easier to pick out the threads, I had a difficult time writing this bit, wondering how much of myself to tell about. This of course has continued to be a struggle for me throughout my research, a journey which I describe more fully in Chapters Three and Five.

The variety and abundance of women's stories as compared with those told by men is obvious. Women's narrations were multi-themed, but despite this complexity, they were not contradictory. I may see this because of my sexual experience as a female. One reason we see this variety and abundance of women's stories is because of their accessibility. Popular literature and self-help books for women dominate bookstore and library shelves. It may also have to do with our being orientations: Women want to read about others to get a sense of themselves therefore a need for stories is created. In any case, the richness of stories available about and by women exemplifies the need for listening to and researching with men.

Our-stories?

What is an our-story? Because experience is filtered through the gender-lens (Josselson, 1992), we hear his-stories and her-stories of first intercourse. But just as there are "commonplaces" (Romberger, 1986) within gendered stories, there are narrative threads that run through both men's and women's stories. I am using the term "our-story" to refer to those common threads in people's stories about the first time. Three narrative threads were reflected in both men's and women's narratives of the first time; *get it over with*, *discouragement and disappointment*, and *closeness and love*.

Some young men and women were simply relieved to *get it over with*.

> *16-year-old male*: I felt relieved. I felt good about getting it over with. No one could say you're a virgin and inexperienced anymore. (Hass, 1979, p. 76)

> *21-year-old female*: I didn't really know the guy. He was in a class I was taking outside of high school and was four or five years older. He asked me to his house for a movie, and I knew that if I said yes, I would have to have sex. That was okay with me. I wanted to get this part of growing up over with, and I didn't see myself as having the chance again. I didn't want to do it the first time awkwardly with someone I really cared about--or so I had convinced myself. The whole experience hurt and bored me. We were on the floor in front of the couch and my head was turned away. The movie *Gremlins* was playing, and I just kept watching the television. (Bouris, 1994, p. 87)

This approach to first time indicated a sense of obligation and duty. This was amusingly illustrated by one author.

> PURPOSE: To verify conclusions drawn by others based on sex and oral sex.
> HYPOTHESIS: Previous findings suggest the results will be highly enjoyable.
> APPARATUS: 2 persons of the opposite sex, 1 camp in the country, 1 bed (optional).
> NOTE: Love is not a variable. (Valenta, 1995, p. 111)

Sex was a compulsory experiment for this young woman. For the young people who told this story, it was a requisite to growing up.

For those who wanted to get it over with, a sense of *discouragement and disappointment* often accompanied their first intercourse.

> This wasn't anything like I'd expected. I knew what an orgasm felt like. I'd had lots by myself. But it was supposed to be so much better with a man. And all it did was hurt... . We parted at the elevator, Joe heading for the stairs, and a few minutes later I was back in my room. Deflowered and deflated. (Blakeslee, 1995, p. 64)
>
> *17-year-old male*: I was happy and relieved that I had finally done it. But sort of depressed in that it was not all it was cracked up to be. (Hass, 1979, p. 78)

One male author uses powerful words to evaluate his unmemorable experience.

> This wasn't what I'd been told would happen. For years and years, everyone I'd talked to and every book I'd read on the subject had treated the First Time as the most memorable event of one's life. Whether it had gone well or not, it was supposed to stick with you for ages. The memories could always fade a bit with each replay, or they could keep you traumatized until you learned to deal with them, but they never disappeared so cursorily, as if they were no more significant than a discarded gum wrapper! True, there may not have been much happening in the first place, for I do remember that I had a tough time finding something to say after the fact. I came up with a lame "I never thought it could be so good," but it didn't mean much. As I was mouthing the words, I was perfectly aware that I was lying through my teeth. Not very fair, is it? The sex scene is censored, yet the disappointment, the awkwardness and the lie are very much with me. (Montpetit, 1995, pp. 95-96)

The connection between *get it over with* and *disappointment and discouragement* piqued my interest. Even though young people did not express high expectations of the first time, they said that it fell short of their appreciation. This suggests that even for disillusioned youth, the myth of the rite of passage is still alive and well.

A "romantic minority" (Bouris, 1994) talked about *closeness and love* as part of their first time.

> *15-year old male*: (I felt) very close to that person. I felt like holding them tightly and not letting go. (Hass, 1979, p. 78)

> When he entered me for the first time, it was an amazing feeling--my body was certainly ready! I was afraid and excited at the same time. Because I felt so safe and comfortable, It was a beautiful experience, which grew into more fun and playfulness and touching and love throughout our four-year relationship. I felt very blessed to be with someone who was also new to learning about sex and was willing to listen to my needs and feelings...It was a learning experience, understanding how my body worked and the mysteries of being a woman; it was wonderful and stimulating. (Bouris, 1994, p. 160)

These young men and women revealed a certain level of comfort with themselves and their sexuality. This made it possible for them to participate emotionally in this special experience.

Although these threads were evident in men's narratives, they were more fully explicated for women. I believe this is again because of the abundance and accessibility of women's stories. As I wrote this section I was reminded that there are as many uniquenesses and similarities within each of us as there are between us. Is the space between us so large after all or is it larger than we think? The voices of young men and women can help us explore that space. To explore space, one needs space. I needed to create that space to begin my inquiry into the personal significance of the first time for men and women.

CHAPTER THREE

Creating a Space for Narrative: The Carpenter and the Composer

There have been two distinct yet inseparable aspects of my research experience: its construction and its composition. Interwoven with the *construction* of my research is the *composition* of my own self as researcher. In creating a space for my research I have been both a carpenter and a composer. As the carpenter I have built my research; defining the research question, selecting the narrators, gathering their stories and interpreting those stories. I built the floor and the roof and the walls: the frame or foundation. As composer I have personalized this space and made it my own, a "home". I have encountered and lived these sub-roles in my journey of identifying with the researcher role.

When I described my identity roles to a colleague she pointed out that both roles I described are traditionally male. I had not thought consciously about this. Taking a moment to reflect I can see that I am associating the carpenter with the positivist paradigm of research. The composer or the homemaker, to stretch my own words, could fit into a more female role as I define it above. I decided not to dwell on the reasons behind the choice of these roles but to keep them in mind as I continued to write. I will tell about each of these roles separately, starting with the easier of the two, the carpenter.

The Carpenter

It has been almost one year since I formally proposed this research project and about a year and a half since I started thinking about it. I was required to write a research proposal for a methods class. As my interest was related to youth sexual behaviour (specifically first intercourse experiences), I began an extensive literature search and consecutive review. I was able to find an abundance of information on the incidence and frequency of sexual behaviour for youth but noticed there was minimal research that described the personal context for sexual behaviour. Many questions remained unanswered for me. Why do youth continue to have sexual intercourse in the face of so many potential risks? Why do they begin having intercourse in the first place? What significance does "having sex" have for them? I decided that I could only answer those questions if I talked directly with youth. So began my foray into qualitative research. I posed my research question as: What is the personal significance of first intercourse for young people? I referred to "significance" as the role that first intercourse plays in young people's lives.

At that point in time, I was using all of the appropriate research jargon. I planned to use purposive sampling (Johnson, 1990) and to have a nonprobability purposive sample (Morse, 1991). I planned to send out an information sheet to interested participants who responded to newspaper and poster advertisements. I intended to use semi-structured interviews as my primary method of data collection and to interview each participant twice. I even suggested interviewing a group of secondary informants to "validate the stories arising from the initial interviews" (Proposal, 1995, p. 17). Here is what really happened.

After my proposal meeting in March and the ethical approval of my research by my faculty in June of 1995, it was time to begin collecting my stories. Both committees expressed some concerns about my safety. My external thesis committee member indicated concern especially when interviewing men about sex in an unsupervised situation. She also questioned whether I could co-author the stories of men having not lived these stories myself. The ethics review committee recommended that I de-emphasize the "sex" part in my advertisements inviting participation. After some deliberation, I confirmed my decision to include men in my study, and to gather participants through different means than advertisements. I felt that people would be more likely to tell me their stories and to "be good at" storytelling if they had some familiarity with me and felt they could trust me. In June, I practiced my interviewing skill with two female friends which allowed me to become more comfortable both with the questions as well as the researcher role. As a teaching assistant in a summer session class on human sexuality I was often present in the classroom. At the time of the midterm exam in July, I told the class about my thesis project and gave students an invitation to participate as they handed in their exams. The guide for classroom presentations and the invitation to participate are shown in Appendix A. That same month I presented a lecture on sexuality and close relationships to a summer session undergraduate class on intimate relationships. I explained my project to this group and handed out an invitation to each student as well. I had set up an answering machine which was accessible only to me. I received calls from five interested students and set up meetings at a time convenient for them.

My conversations with the three men and two women who shared their stories took place in two different academic offices. Before each conversation, I took care to create an atmosphere conducive to story sharing. I placed a Mexican style tablecloth and a small pot of dried flowers on the table. An unobtrusive microphone was attached to the tablecloth with the tape recorder out of sight. As the offices are on the sunny side of the building, I was able to keep the lights off to create a more natural setting, almost like being at a kitchen table. I had water, tea and coffee available as well as change to buy soda.

We began each interview conversation by exchanging introductions and initiating small talk about school and the weather. When we were seated and no longer shuffling, I paraphrased the consent form. A copy of the form is attached in Appendix B. We went through the form together and I clarified any questions for each participant. I pointed out the resource list I had attached for them in case our conversation brought up any issues they would like to explore in another setting. I set up refreshments while the participants re-read and signed two consent forms: one for them to keep and one for my records.

Four of the five students are included in my study. The pseudonyms the four students chose for themselves are Aurora, Luis, Elle and Tam. I will let them introduce themselves.

> *Aurora, 23 years old:* I've been married for 2 years in December and I'm in Nursing. I moved from Saskatchewan about 2 years ago. My parents are there, and I have one sister that lives in the US and one that lives in Saskatchewan. My husband's a Ph.D. student here. My personality has been changing quite a bit lately-- I used to be really outgoing and now I'm finding myself becoming more quiet and shy almost. It's changed since high school. I guess it's probably because I'm married and I don't have a lot in common with the people I go to school with-- most of them are 18. I think I've changed, too, because I've been on several medications lately and I've gained a lot of weight. I used to weigh 95 pounds, so I think that has a lot to do with it as well. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

> *Elle, 24 years old:* I am a student, I have a year of school to go to finish my Arts degree and that's actually very positive for me right now. I didn't really have the best attitude towards school when I started university, but over the few years I've taken some time off because we had a death in the family--my father passed away. That time off really helped and I got more focused in terms of school. I think I'm a hard-working, trustworthy, dedicated kind of a person. I sometimes come across as being cynical but I think that's just to protect myself because I don't want people to know how vulnerable I am. I've had one sexual relationship. I haven't had another one because I get attached easily and I know I would get hurt. (Conversation 1, pp. 1-2)

> *Luis, 23 years old:* I'm taking summer courses and I occupy my time by working out a lot. I swim every morning. I'm in my fourth year of Business, and I can't wait to get out. I think school is one of those places where you find yourself. A lot of my development happened in student residence. I was in a student leadership role as well as on the executive of an association and throughout that time I had so many various situations that occurred that have just totally changed my outlook on how life really works. It's just opened my mind to all of the possibilities, so right now I figure that I'm still developing. I've only said those three words once, but I always try to focus on the atmosphere of the relationship rather than the sex part. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

> *Tam, 22 years old:* I just finished my fourth year of science. The fact of graduation coming up is a pretty big worry. My parents separated probably 12, 13 years ago so I'm living with my mom and my brother. I'm the oldest son, and in a way I take over the father role in the house. It's a really good relationship at home right now. I'm a pretty funny guy! I think I'm a moody person, too, but most of the time, I'm pretty outgoing and if things are looking drab then I put on the old boots and get out there start things up, so people usually like to have me around. When I get to know someone I'm a very trusting person and the close friends I get are very close friends. I had one long term relationship that lasted for three years, and then just one other after that. But I knew that one was just for sex, so I don't feel good about it. (Conversation 1, pp. 1-3)

As a narrative researcher, I am interested in developing my understanding of the significance of first intercourse to young people. I attempt to understand this significance through narrative inquiry and interpretation. "...(P)eople by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 416). I gathered the stories of young men and women through semi-structured conversations. Our conversations generally followed a guide I developed with the input of my thesis committee, written resources (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Szojka, 1994) and resource persons (friends and colleagues). The guide is shown in Appendix C.

Our conversations ranged from twenty minutes (Terry) to two and a half hours (Tam). I began by asking the students to tell me about their lives at the moment to begin the conversation just like one might with a friend one has not seen in a while. I needed to know about the students' lives in order to understand the place or meaning of first intercourse for them. Next, I asked them to tell about their personal identities: How would you tell yourself who you really are? What does being a wo/man mean to you? In Women's Ways of Knowing, Belenky et al. (1986) suggest beginning with these types of questions to allow a meaning-ful conversation to develop. I continued asking them to tell me how they learned about their sexual selves, some significant childhood experiences that had affected their sexual development, the meaning of these experiences and their process of becoming more sexually active in puberty and adolescent years. Szojka (1994) explored the significance of teachers' personal professional visions and asked about experiences and their meanings to get at "significance". These questions also reflect my belief that humans are sexual from birth and that becoming sexually active is a process rather than one event.

Talking about sexuality during childhood and puberty naturally led up to "the big one". Even though I had attempted to build rapport and comfort with the other questions, the phrase *first intercourse* caught us off guard every time. I asked about the situation leading up to and including first sexual intercourse, about details of their relationships with their first partner (length of the relationship, role of physical sexuality). I believed that talking about expectations and perceptions, how they developed and their influence on sexual relationships would reveal something about the significance of first intercourse for each person. Szojka (1994) asked the teachers in her study similar questions to determine significance of their personal professional visions. Finally, I asked the obvious question: What role has first intercourse played in your life? I usually followed by defining "role": Did it change your perception of yourself? Your sexuality? Did it change your life? I attempted to close our conversations by asking how I might learn about the significance of first intercourse in their lives and how they would describe it, who they would share it with and how they would share it with different people. I also asked if there were another way they would like to express themselves. I usually phrased this as something to think about until our next contact to naturally round off our conversations.

During most conversations I did not to take any notes at all. I preferred to journal afterwards, although not immediately. I found that after each conversation I needed some time to reconnect with myself. I wrote in three different journals--green, blue and floral. I also wrote on yellow note pad paper. My choice of journal or paper seemed to correspond with my feelings about my identity as a researcher at the time: blue as optimism, green and yellow as self-analysis and floral as certainty and purpose.

I identified most with Elle, Aurora and Tam and this is evident in my journal entries after our conversations. My writing was more introspective, focussed on my reaction to the conversation and my identification with the storyteller.

> This interview moved me more than any so far. I felt spent after it was over. There were so many times I wanted to jump in and reassure Aurora that she was okay. She really places a lot of importance on physical attractiveness in her sex life. When she isn't feeling attractive, it isn't happening. I wanted to reach out - I could have cried myself. So many experiences of mine echoed hers - the older girls calling her a slut, feeling like sex (intercourse) was my "duty" as a girlfriend. I think that's why I responded so emotionally. After she left, I shut the door, took a deep breath, and a few tears ran down my face. (Green Journal, August 9, 1995)

> I really felt at ease with Elle...She again appealed to me because of my likeness to her. I could identify with her saying she gets attached easily (the Aphrodite in me!) and sometimes gets easily hurt because she's so attached. She talked about her recent greater awareness of gender issues, which mirrors my experience...I talked more about myself with Elle than any of the others... (Green Journal, August 10, 1995)

> He told me so much about Catherine. In some ways, I identified with her, her insecurity. In other ways, I was angry with her. When he told me where she worked, I had a morbid curiosity to go and see what she looks like. I wanted to see the woman who had manipulated him. (Green Journal, August 11, 1995)

I noticed that my journalizing after talking with Luis was different. I became interpretive almost immediately, trying to understand him.

> What makes him seem so nonchalant about his experiences? Maybe he's hiding something, hiding himself. Yet he reveals such a depth when talking about his experiences with the girls in the dorm. I couldn't get connected to him. I wonder if that was his intention. (Green Journal, August 4, 1995)

As I described earlier, three men and two women shared their stories with me. Only two of the three men appear in my study. Terry was a good friend of Luis and I sensed in our conversation that he was not committed to the study. For example, he did not remember any significant experiences in his childhood and would often talk for only two or three sentences, even with further probing. I tried calling him several times to check out his interest in the study and perhaps schedule another meeting, but he never returned my calls. After this response, I decided that my initial feeling of his lack of commitment was correct and stopped trying to contact him. I am satisfied that my conversations with the other four participants (a balance of two males and two females) helped me deepen my understanding of the significance of first intercourse, but I still feel a sense of unfinished business with Terry. I would like to send him an abstract of my thesis to let him know what unfolded over the past year.

I did not begin transcribing until I had completed all five meetings as they occurred so closely together in time. I decided not to transcribe Terry's interview and set to work on the other four. Although the department's transcribing machine was helpful, its name was misleading. I was the transcriber, listening over and over again to those four voices to get as close to "what they really said" as I could. This process took me longer than I expected as I had to share the machine with someone working on another project. After transcribing all four conversations I called the participants and invited them to take a look at the transcriptions. As none of them had any discrepancies with the text of the typed conversations I began thinking how I would go about interpreting them.

In a lengthy telephone conversation in early October 1995 my external committee member, an experienced narrative researcher, described some ways I might begin. I read through each transcript with two highlighters, one green and one yellow. With the yellow, I underlined conversation which appeared to be philosophical. I reserved the green highlighter for anecdotal, storylike conversation. As I highlighted, I jotted brief "essence" words in the column beside the text. After this first reading, I jotted down my "hypotheses" (Rosenthal, 1993) about the narrative threads emerging for each person and their nature (green or yellow). I noted where I was surprised, where I observed something I expected. I re-read each conversation and re-visited my initial interpretations. As the threads emerged and re-emerged, I thought about how I would tell about the significance of first intercourse for each person, how I would re-present their narratives. I had the building materials, so to speak, for the foundation of my research space.

The Composer

> Composing...involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present... (Bateson, 1989, pp. 29-30 in Huber, 1992)

Continual reimagining and reinterpreting is tiring and often the meaning of the present is more blurry than it is clear. As I struggled and sometimes succeeded to compose myself as narrative researcher throughout this experience, the purpose of my research appeared to be elusive: It faded in and out of focus. The greatest task of creating a space for my research was identifying with the researcher role. Three times in particular stand out for me in this process of identification. The first is at the time I formally proposed my research, the second during my story collecting and initial interpretation and the third in the final stages of pulling my experience together. Here are my stories of moving in and out of focus as a researcher.

The Naive Optimist

As a new kid on the block in the area of qualitative research, I had days where I felt as though I was five years old again. What did I know? Fresh out of a quantitatively based methods class in our department, forty page proposal in hand, I began a course focused on qualitative methods. "Hey, if I was going to do qualitative research, I may as well learn about it."

> Class seems to be getting clearer. My own research on the other hand wavers from dumbfoundedness to illumination. I talked to Pat Rafferty today about the role of the philosophy and methodology in a research proposal. It's difficult to see the difference. She told me there was a problem if they were different, that they are interrelated. Whew! I know something about qualitative research. (Blue Journal, January 25, 1995)

The qualitative class undoubtedly broadened my exposure to different qualitative methods and methodologies. In my "forty pager" I proposed a grounded theory style of inquiry and analysis. As I read research using different methodologies, I knew my research question demanded a narrative style of inquiry.

> Illumination! I'm changing my thesis methodology to narrative. It became plain as I was writing my 503 assignment. I'm changing, I'm learning. (Blue Journal, February 6, 1995)

I was required to complete a research project for this course which included an interview based on my research interests. I was making the final preparations for my formal thesis proposal and I was eager to bring my experience of an interview to our meeting.

> I feel hyped about doing my research after doing this interview. I want to get going on things. If I have any other volunteers I would like to interview them soon so that I can keep this buzz. It feels great! Now I have some identity as a qualitative researcher. I can talk about interviewing and how it feels, problems, triumphs. Woohoo! (Blue Journal, March 6, 1995)

The interview was an important experience for me in beginning to call what I was doing *research*. My involvement in Narrative Works in Progress seminars at the Centre for Research in Teacher Education and Development also increased my feeling of belonging in the research community.

> The narrative "works in progress" is very interesting...the group provided a new atmosphere I haven't yet experienced as a qualitative research. It was a place that people were interested in and talking about things I wanted to hear! (Blue Journal, March 8, 1995)

Throughout this time I was diligently writing in my blue journal. I have come to see this journal as a symbol of "putting my best foot forward". I was imitating what I thought a good researcher would do. I began writing at the front of the book. I dated each entry, and the dates appeared in chronological sequence. I reflected on all experiences that triggered me to think about my research. I wrote in the blue journal until shortly after March 17, the day of my proposal.

As my St. Patrick's Day proposal neared, I was literally feeling the luck of the Irish. I was living in a researcher's skin! I was writing, reflecting, reading--doing the business of research.

> I feel I really had a chance to reflect and think about what qualitative research means and does not mean...It connects me to my work - I see as a part of me, me a part of it. My proposal is on Friday and I will get feedback from a qualitative researcher for the first time. I'm excited and not too nervous. I feel ready to get going. (Blue Journal, March 14, 1995)

The proposal experience actually ended up to be the first big burst in my balloon. I think I had romanticized qualitative research to the point that I thought the rewards would always outweigh the personal investments.

> My proposal today was...overwhelming. That is the only way I can put it. I couldn't sense negativity but the constructive criticism was thick indeed. I learned a lot today. I had wanted to try and keep my cool, pretend that my proposal was...a stack of paper. Not me. But I am so connected to it. I feel like it's been around so long. And now to change it. Oh God, this Master's thing *is* work. (Blue Journal, March 17, 1995)

And so ended my naiveté. Our conversation about my research plan brought into question my readiness to begin and my knowledge of narrative method. After the best foot failed, I did not know which foot to put forward. But somehow I kept walking, even though I did not quite know where I was going. The end was not in sight.

Descent into Darkness

Enter green journal and yellow paper. Soon after the proposal, the term ended and I needed to make some money fast to keep myself in school. During May and June I concentrated on outside work and put my research to the side. I do not do any writing during this time, which I now regret. It was a way for me to disconnect. I came back to my research in July and began collecting my stories. I enjoyed meeting and conversing with the students but I was still disconnected. My green journal reflects this: It was actually a notebook in which I used to do library searches, plan my research assistantships and decipher messages from my new Spanish speaking friends. I would write on the first blank page I opened to, many times without dating them. My writing immediately after the conversations was quite coherent despite its disorganized appearance. It was focused on the conversation, my initial impressions and reflection on my role as researcher.

> I'm really wondering about the experience she didn't want to share. I think that may have affected her sexual expression in a negative way as well - she suggested it wasn't supposed to happen. I don't know if I want to pry any further - this seems pretty close for her. I also have to draw a boundary - I'm not her therapist, I just want to know her stories as she wants to tell them. (Green Journal, August 9, 1995)

After my story collecting I again moved away from research and into paid work. This was another recordless period. In October I was able to bring my research back into focus. I started writing again, on a random page in the green journal, on October 15. The pressures of my extracurricular commitments and long distance relationship were getting to me.

> I just had sexual assault training all weekend and I feel drained and exhausted. I am too tired right now. I want to write later about - boundaries, - who is it really for?, - notes about being straight, - male/female friendships, - overanalyzing others? me? As you can see, I've got lots on the brain but I need some concentrated time and a more relaxing environment. I can't create it tonight. (Green Journal, October 15, 1995)

Two nights later:

> Am I intentionally avoiding having time in the evening to spend on myself? I did set a boundary by coming home right after the show. I hope Di understands - I enjoy being with the guys but I need to spend time (even phone time) with Mark. (Green Journal, October 17, 1995)

My self reflection had now entered into self analysis. As I discovered and rediscovered my Aphrodite story I began to examine my intimate relationships, my life goals, my unsung dreams. I began to realize that I hadn't been taking risks in my life and that I had let important decisions about my future be made for me by not making any decisions at all. I wanted to reclaim control over myself. I wanted my wings.

> I need to spend some time thinking about my boundaries. Right now I am struggling with Aphrodite. She wants to be 18 again. I said to Carolyn yesterday, "Why did I become sexually experienced at 17-20?" I wish I was experiencing these things now - when I know what I want, in a partner and in a sexual relationship. Can we ever feel the rush again of first attraction, before that other way of knowing? (Yellow Paper, October 25, 1995)

To make matters more, shall we say *interesting*, I became terribly attracted to a man whom I had met late in the summer. Just when it seemed the support of my long distance partner was waning, entered a thoughtful, critical, sensitive man whose main requirement in a "co-pilot" was that she knew how to "fly". My feelings seemed unavoidable. There weren't many days I did not end up crying wondering what to do about my situation. Later on, I described that feeling as being insane. I truly felt insane.

> Aphrodite is screaming to be heard. It's so hard to know what is imagined and what is real. I struggle to think about who I can talk to. Will there be anyone who will understand where I'm coming from? I know this is naive - to think I'm unique. But I'm so caught up right now in this wave. I feel the rush and the fall, the ebb and the flow. How will I handle this? Who will handle this - Aphrodite or Artemis? I need some perspective. Writing about this is torture...I feel a strange mixture of ecstasy and confusion. In and out of focus. How true. (Yellow Paper, November 8, 1995)

I think I wrote on the yellow paper because I could tear it off the pad. I could hide the yellow paper. I did hide the yellow paper. I felt like I was falling, or descending into darkness of a dark tunnel. I was so far removed from my researcher role that I did not, could not write about my research. I explained to a friend that I felt I was hanging on to the bumper of a car driving out of control. I wanted to get into the driver's seat and out of the tunnel.

End of the Tunnel

I see it now, the light. And things are in focus most of the time. With my butt firmly in the driver's seat, I am working through the issues in my personal life. I have come to a place where I feel I can fly. The floral journal focuses on the end of the tunnel. It is full of outlines and to-do lists and half formed ideas. There is also poetry, quotes, library call numbers and even my New Year's Resolutions. It is the culmination of my re-imagination and re-interpretation of my identity as a researcher.

> It took me a long time to see myself as a researcher. At first I did not identify at all - this shows my limited perception of what a researcher is! Well, maybe not limited, just sometimes a little out of focus. (Floral Journal, March, 1996)

As I wrote this chapter I thought a lot about re-imagining the future and re-interpreting the past to give meaning to the present. At one point, my future was the proposal. Now, I see my defense. The past used to be years ago, whereas now it is yesterday. I feel like a researcher again. Even in the last stages things are still moving in and out of focus. And they will never be crystal clear. That idea does not frighten me. I am home.

Welcome Home

My study is presented as a series of narratives, expressed in images and stories, about the role and meaning of each person's first sexual intercourse experience. My emerging interpretations were reviewed by my supervisor and two colleagues. After several revisions, they appear as they do on the following pages. I share some of the stories as narrated by the students and re-present stories as I understand them. These narratives of experience are a reflection of my developed understanding of the significance of first sexual intercourse for these four young men and women. They construct a larger web of meaning to shed light on the connections between sexual behaviour, sexual identity and self-esteem.

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Time: Narratives of Experience

> Themes of passion and passionate arousal are heard through most people's life stories, sometimes dominant, sometimes counterpoint, sometimes barely audible. (Josselson, 1992, p. 70)

Written words cannot capture the experience of my conversations with Tam, Elle, Luis and Aurora. Narrative is a way to represent the time we shared. However, narrative attaches us to others and to our own stories by providing a rich tapestry of time, place, character that contributes both to our knowing and to our being known (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). I imagine myself at a loom, weaving these narrative threads to the context I have created with my own stories and the stories represented in research and literature. As I entered a cycle of inquiry and interpretation, the tapestry began to take form. In this chapter, I describe my accounts and interpretations of my conversations with the four young men and women. What emerges is a rich and detailed montage.

Elle

Elle was the only participant that I obtained from contacting the intimate relationships class. I first met her the day of our conversation. It was my third conversation meeting in six days, and I was energized. For this reason, and because of the feeling I got from her voice on the phone, I was excited to meet her. When she arrived at the office I was not disappointed. The same warm voice and brown eyes to match helped me feel immediately at ease. I felt we were really in tune with one another. This, along with my increasing research experience, allowed me to share more about myself with Elle than any of the others.

Immediately after our conversation, I had some clear ideas about what role the first time had played for Elle.

> I also got the sense that she was really in tune with what I was getting at about first intercourse and role in life. She talked about it making her more honest and letting her get to know herself better. (Green Journal, August 10, 1995)

After reading over and interpreting our conversation in two in-depth sessions a few months apart, this theme was re-vealed and further shaped. Three narrative threads emerged from our conversation: "It was a nice first time"; "I learned so much about myself"; and "I have to go with who I am". These threads weave my account of the significance of the first time for Elle.

"It was a nice first time"

Elle remembers playing out "you know, the typical kind of doctor scenario - you have this and I have this" (Conversation 1, p. 3) as a child. She said that although she was quite open about sexuality, she got quite a different view from her mother.

> I think I got funny signals from my mom. I keep coming back to her because she is a big, significant person in my life, and even my dad to an extent, even though I think he was a little more open-minded. She was very good about it: When I was 9 years old she sat she me down and read me a book about sex and everything, but before then, everything was pretty hush-hush. So, it was something I really wasn't supposed to talk to her about, or talk about until her designated time and then she was all willing to talk about it and then that's when I didn't want to talk about it because I was too embarrassed. I can't even say that it was overtly said and I don't even know how it was implied but it was just something bad. (Conversation 1, p. 3)

Seeing the relationship between her mother and father, Elle got some early impressions of her parents' sex life and sex in general.

> I just remember attempts by my father to be just normally affectionate in front of me. Like hugging, that was kind of an odd sight because she would stiffen and she wasn't open to that, at least not in front of me and so I guess after I understood what went on in the bedroom that made me wonder, "Well, what kind of a sex life do they have?" Is it just, you know, that typical idea that the mother tells her daughter, "Well, just lie there and wait 'til it's over" type of a thing? I think that that's what started to emerge in my mind once I got a little older; it was really weird because there was such a discrepancy between what I saw there and on TV. On TV you see two partners who go to each other and embrace each other passionately and I never saw that and I couldn't understand that. (Conversation 1, p. 4)

The discrepancy of her mother's signals and television also contributed to her ideas and expectations about the first time.

> I really wasn't sure what to expect. I think I was afraid, I think I expected some pain to be involved in the first time. I wanted it to be some, you know, some amazing union of two souls (*laughing*)! Where did I get that from? Probably TV, certainly not from my parent--although there were times where, it wasn't a direct reference to sex, but because I was their only child they always expressed a lot of warmth about me being a product of each of them--but mostly probably from TV and books. I've never read a romance novel, but it doesn't matter, there's always some sex in books they always describe it so wonderfully. (Conversation 1, pp. 5-6)

Her preparation for first intercourse was somewhat ambivalent.

When I asked Elle to describe the situation surrounding her first time, she hesitated for a moment and then began to speak.

> Well, I went out with this boy, Jordan, and I had known him for about 6 years before we started dating. I had always had a crush on him, and then one night we just started talking and we hit it off, and we started dating after that. I think it was about a year and a half after we had seen each other--while we did have a physical relationship, it was in some ways, on my part at least, very uninformed. I didn't really know what I was doing but it felt good and we'd only go to a certain point. He never pressured me. I knew he really wanted to have sex but he knew, because we had talked about it, that I was not ready. I wasn't ready and I didn't feel good about it just yet. We'd always go just so far and then we would stop, and then one day it was totally unplanned, we just went a little further than we had expected. When we realized that we had actually done, actually it was just penetration, we were both really scared (*laughing*) and we got dressed. We put on whatever we'd taken off, and he left and we just didn't know what to do. It was total panic. We did not know, oh, it was really bizarre and then we said, "Okay, enough of this - we either buy some condoms or go on the pill and we decide to do this." So I finally did, and I don't know when we decided, after we had finally done this, and gotten the proper contraceptives and whatnot, while enjoyed it there was a lot of guilt involved with it, the fact that it was sex, the fact that I was hiding something from my mother. (Conversation 1, pp. 4-5)

After the surprise and lack of planning of the first penetration, the *real* first time, complete with contraceptives, "was actually very nice" (Conversation 1, p. 6).

> It was a really nice first time, I think, judging from things that I've read about other women; because we were very open in terms of communication, because we had discussed things and had kind of decided on a place and there was nobody home, and because it was kind of in a planned environment and it was safe, so to speak. It was romantic in a way, it was both our first time really together. The physical part of it was good, too, maybe not as great as later on in the relationship, but I think it was more the whole package that I enjoyed about it, rather than just the physical part of it. I can't speak for him, but he was quite a romantic (*laughing*) we were young and (*laughing*) yeah, the whole atmosphere was quite nice. (Conversation 1, p. 6)

When I asked her if this "really nice" evaluation was retrospective or more representative of how she feels now, she was thoughtful.

> I'm not sure, obviously recall is not the most reliable thing at times, and it's possible that I'm looking at it through rose glasses and flowering it and making it better than it was, which is very probable knowing me, but I think that it was a fairly pleasant experience at the time. I may be forgetting some things selectively because I don't want to remember them, but as far as I can tell, that's the way I felt. (Conversation 1, p. 7)

How about the way she sees it now compared to how she saw it then? Are they similar?

> I think so *(SD: Do you still feel the guilt?)* No, not at all, no, I look on it quite fondly, and because it was special and it was somebody that I loved, I don't have any regrets about it at all, or feel guilty about it anymore. I think it was just because I felt guilty about everything. I couldn't believe that we were necking in his car. That was such a shock to me because until I started dating him, I fully expected to wait until I was married to have sex, so I was totally shocked with my own behaviour. I thought that that's what I was gonna do, but now I was changing my whole life plan. (Conversation 1, p. 7)

Deciding to have intercourse changed her life story. It also played a role in changing her life. The expectations she had for her first intercourse as a result of her mother's messages and behaviours were not met, to her pleasant surprise. "It was a good place to start" (Conversation 1, p. 13).

"I learned so much about myself"

Elle began describing her personal journey almost the moment she sat down.

> I guess it's this time in my life where I'm trying to find myself and that's all part of it, I guess. I would say that this year has been, aside from the year that he (father) passed away, one of the most painful years of my life but I've learned so much that I accept it. It's been okay because I've just learned so much about myself and I'm continuing to do so. It's been kind of good in a way. I see the positive value of it. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

She talked about learning about herself in the past few years, a journey that was shaped primarily by two events: becoming sexually active with Jordan and the death of her father. She described the exclusive and combined effects of these two events.

In terms of her sexuality "nothing really sticks out" (Conversation 1, p. 4) from her childhood. She described her learning as happening after she began dating Jordan. When I asked her what role becoming sexually active has had in her life, she had a lot to say about how it affected her sexual identity.

> It changed how I looked at myself. It was just different to think that, "I've had sex!" because it surprised me and it wasn't an unpleasant thing either. It was kind of like, "Yeah, I *did*!" and it wasn't wholly unpleasant or it wasn't wholly pleasant because you know, there was all that guilt. I learned how much I hate guilt and how much I do not want to do that to my kids if I'm gonna have them, and I've realized how important sexuality is to your identity. It really is such a big part of who you are. It also causes insecurity: I mean, then you start thinking about your body and, "Oh my God, I got fat on here, and look like this and these don't look quite right" and you're always worrying about shaving your legs but I think that overall it's been a positive thing. It's led to a lot of growth, I think, and starting to know myself a bit more. (Conversation 1, p. 12-13)

She also talked about learning about her sexuality through her continued relationship with Jordan.

> I think that we both learned quite a bit during those 3 years. We learned a lot. It's a growing period to begin with, I think, but I learned so much in that time, and some of it has changed. Actually a lot of it has changed but I think that because I had a positive experience with him, it's helped me to develop a more positive image about sex in general and about my own sexuality, too--not to think of it as such a bad thing, but something to be enjoyed. I think it's been really good actually. (Conversation 1, p. 8)

Later on, she seemed to talk about her experiences and growth *after* Jordan as shaping her positive view of sexuality.

> I think that I've changed since Jordan. I tended to much more submissive and I didn't feel it was my place to be the instigator or to be the dominant one, and now I'm kind of eager for a new relationship because I think I'm a little more aggressive. I'm more likely to be the instigator now: Maybe it has to do with being a little more sure of what I'm doing now and not being so afraid of it. I think that I was afraid of sex and I don't know if it was because it was such a guilt laden thing for me. Maybe I just don't wanna start anything again because then I'll have to deal with it (*laughing*) but I think I'm developing a much more positive view of it, and that relationship really helped things. I think I'm more passionate than I was. I think that I can be more involved in it. It sounds kind of funny, but I wasn't "there" sometimes, and maybe it's because I just didn't feel like I was doing anything. I was just, you know, a body and that was a problem. I guess that's why he felt unattractive because I wasn't doing as much as I could've and it was just because I felt I shouldn't be doing anything--this was wrong, you know, and nice girls don't do that. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

To clarify the role of the relationship in the development of a more positive view of sexuality, I asked whether this development happened during the relationship or afterward.

> I think that in the past two years now it's just come with maturing a bit more and knowing myself. I've had to really look at who I am, and my behaviour and I'm still learning every day. That kind of got the ball rolling so to speak, the relationship. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Her first time and the relationship with Jordan seemed to instigate her search for sexual identity rather than determine that sexual identity.

Her father's death three years ago contributed indirectly to her coming to know her sexual self. She spoke with passion about his influence on her life.

> I think my father's death in particular, that had a really big impact. I took a year off school, and I worked for about four months later on, but I did nothing for quite awhile. I just couldn't, I was just too distraught, and I threw myself into some work. I was being pulled between my mother and Jordan, and then we

> broke up. I don't waste my time to say, "What if he was alive?" but obviously, I wouldn't be the person that I am had he been alive. I think my dad really knew what was going on. He never said anything, and the thing with him was that he kind of figured once I was eighteen I made my own decisions and I was welcome to come to him for advice but besides that, it was up to me to make my own decisions. To me that meant that was a respect for my autonomy, he let me be who I was and who I needed to be, and that was a really good thing, but once he wasn't there to say, "It's okay to make your own decisions" I had to say, "It's okay to make my own decisions" to myself. So that was a big growth period I would say, I learned a lot, not all pleasant that's for sure. (Conversation 1, p. 12)

She is still dealing with the impact of her father's death. She expressed this at the very beginning of our conversation.

> It's been 3 years now since my dad passed away and I'm still dealing with it. I think a lot has to do with relationships, with my boyfriend at the time and my mother. I never really had time to grieve. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

Elle's relationships with Jordan and her mother detracted from coming to terms with her father's death. She was preoccupied with the changes in these relationships which largely resulted from the changes in herself, caused by her sexual initiation and her father's death.

While both parents impacted Elle's growth and learning, it is plain that they had very different influences on her. Earlier she described the guilt she felt about sex as an influence her mother.

> While I enjoyed it, there was a lot of guilt involved with it; the fact that it was sex, the fact that I was hiding something from my mother. It was a lie. (Conversation 1, p. 5)

I found it interesting that she said nothing about her father's reaction to finding out she was sexually active but recounted telling her mother.

> So eventually I just told her. I sat her down one day and I told her, and she cried. Well, she didn't cry then. She was very quiet, and she said, "I expected this to happen eventually" and then the next morning I got up and she was crying in her cereal. (Conversation 1, p. 5)

Despite her mother's initial negative reaction, they were able to forge a new relationship with one another, both because of Elle's honesty about sexual initiation and the absence of her father.

> It (first intercourse) did to an extent change things between my mother and I, and I think once she got past the initial shock, it's not something that she really wants to think about too much, but I think it's allowed us to be a bit more honest with each other. I try to be as open and I try to facilitate communication. She

> tends to completely close up and doesn't talk, but our relationship changed because my dad was no longer there to be the mediator between us. (Conversation 1, pp. 12-13)

She learned some hard lessons about sex--and love, too--in her three year relationship with Jordan. When I asked about the role that physical sex and intercourse played in their relationship, she revealed more of this learning and growth.

> It was positive for quite a while, and then I got really sick from the birth control pill. It had caused kind of a systemic illness and so I wasn't even myself mentally for about a year. Then my father passed away, and that year was just a nightmare, and he (Jordan) felt very rejected, particularly sexually, because I was not interested in it. It was too painful, I was too sick, and I was feeling miserable because he was miserable and I couldn't make him happy. I think I was figuring out how much work a relationship could be and he figured that, well, this isn't what I thought it was gonna be. You know, it's supposed to be all googly eyes and bliss the whole time and it's not (*laughing*) so I think we both started out with a lot of unreal expectations. But while I was realizing that that's not the way it was going, he couldn't deal with that anymore, so we would break up and we'd get back together. We did that a couple times and then we just realized that it's too hard, and so it ended. I think it ended because he didn't know who I was, I didn't know who I was anymore and he felt unattractive and I felt miserable and it was just really bad, so it played quite a big role in the dissolution of our relationship. (Conversation 1, pp. 8-9)

She summed up the relationship and her learning from it as being positive.

> We both treated each other really well, it was just nice, and it got bad near the end, but it was a good place to start. I think I was spoiled now for other relationships. (Conversation 1, p. 13)

"I have to go with who I am"

While the narrative thread "I learned so much about myself" explicated her process of learning, the outcome of this learning for Elle was the realization that she had to be true to herself. She described this realization as emerging through different experiences since the time she began her relationship with Jordan. She highlighted three experiences in particular: her first intercourse; the later stages of her relationship with Jordan; and the process of learning about women's issues.

In the early part of our conversation, Elle talked about her first time and wanting to be honest with her mother about having done it.

> I couldn't stand pretending to be something that I wasn't--her little untouched flower--so eventually I just told her. I just couldn't stand to pretend to be something that I wasn't. (Conversation 1, p. 5)

She felt she had changed as a person and wanted to face that.

The following excerpt from our conversation illustrates the impact of her relationship with Jordan on coming to know herself and her reactions and on the emerging realization that she had to be herself.

> *How long after you stopped seeing Jordan did you begin another sexual relationship?*
>
> I haven't actually, there's been a couple of people in the last year I would say that I've come close to (being sexually active with). I think that part of learning is that I realize that I just couldn't do it. I couldn't be with somebody that I really wasn't seriously emotionally involved with and I knew that if I did, that I would become attached to these people probably more than they would be to me, and I would be hurt. I just know that I wouldn't feel good about doing it and so I couldn't allow that to happen and so I stopped things, in one case we became very close, but I'm glad that I stopped it now because I just realize that this is a person that I don't wanna be involved with.
>
> *Do you think it was the first intercourse, I can't say that has caused you not to become involved with anyone else, but did your feelings change at all for Jordan at all when you had first intercourse, did you become much more attached after that?*
>
> Yes, I would say I think that I did. Maybe I tend to equate sex with love and that's why I can't, or I won't currently. There's a part of me that would just love to sometimes be able to just casually have sex but I can't and I won't, just because I know that that would be hurting me--not just in terms of falling in love with someone, or thinking that I'm in love with someone, because I realize I can get infatuated with someone for awhile, but it tends to die and I come to my senses, thank God--but just because I know that I wouldn't feel good about myself. It would be more of an inner thing within myself. It would be another kind of a lie and I couldn't deal with that. Now **that's** starting to become important: I have to go with who I am and that's just not me.
>
> *It sounds like the first intercourse was reasonably pleasurable: It wasn't a bad experience. I can't see that you would not choose to have intercourse because of something bad about it but that perhaps you saw it as so positive with someone you were attached to that it gives you something to aspire to and that another one hasn't come along yet.*
>
> Yes, I would probably say that that's probably an accurate assessment and sometimes I worry that I'm stuck waiting for the ideal thing to come along, but I think that that's okay, too. I realize that this is another part of me, becoming more aware of issues, and I have a lot of demands now for a partner. I'm not gonna settle anymore and I think that at one point I would have had a tendency to do that. Not that he (Jordan) was like that. He was very special to me and continues to be so. I think he has more respect for women than for men to be quite honest. He's very progressive that way, and that's nice, but we got stuck

> into some very typical situations, into very typical roles, and while he didn't do anything to instigate it, I think that I actually posed these things on myself. He didn't do anything to change them either, and so now that I'm aware, the little flags go up. I wouldn't throw a relationship away just because one little thing happened but I would definitely communicate with that person and say, "Look, I saw this pattern, and while it might just be a little trivial thing, I want it to stop" or, "Let's try and work on it." (Conversation 1, pp. 9-10)

Part of being herself seems to be not settling for the typical in a relationship. It's almost like she is learning to write and live her *own* rather than another story.

Her interest and sensitivity to women's issues cropped up in the beginning of our conversation as she explained her view of herself as a woman.

> I've learned a lot actually about women's issues and that's really increased my awareness. I've become much more sensitive to little things in everyday life between men and women, particularly with friends and watching people interact. Because I'm in Sociology that's what I do, so maybe in some ways it's made me more defensive. I think that gender issues are something that I would like to study, I think essentially people want the same things it's just we're socialized to behave differently. I think that's really unfortunate because we tend to pigeonhole people based on gender. I see some things that just upset me, everyday little things that, while they may seem trivial to most people, I think that they just perpetuate these gender stereotypes. Now, I do speak up. That's something that I've never done before but I'm starting to not put up with that kind of stuff anymore. My mom wants me to be quiet and not say too much, but I can't be like that: that would just be a lie to me, and I think she has a hard time swallowing that sometimes and in some ways that really feels good (*laughing*)! I don't feel that I have to defend my behaviour in that regard anyway, but sometimes I feel it's really frustrating. While she wants the best for me, there is kind of a double message that she sends sometimes about what a woman should be, so that's hard. (Conversation 1, pp. 1-2)

Being a woman and the meaning of that was certainly shaped by her mother, but I felt that Elle expressed a clear sense of moving to being her *own* person--becoming herself. Because this is something I felt very early on in my interpretation, I was intrigued that I found this thread in her language.

Becoming Herself

Early on in my interpretation of our conversation, I had the strong sense that Elle had "become herself" in the experiences of the past few years. I have written about her as "Elle" (French for "she") since last fall and this seemed to be the only appropriate identity for her. In our second conversation, I asked her about both of these instincts. She told me that when she had read the draft of my above interpretation "shivers ran down (her) spine" (Conversation 2, 1996). She felt that seeing her story in a written format helped clarify her story for her because in the first conversation, she had felt like she was not clear. She "loved" the name and wholeheartedly approved of me using it.

As for the idea that she was becoming herself, she was thoughtful. She told me that yes, I had hit the nail on the head, and that she felt she was still becoming. We talked about the idea that becoming herself meant feeling in control of her life and her decisions. As the young butterfly takes flight her destination is not certain, but that she is her own pilot is unquestionable.

Aurora

Aurora contacted me shortly after the Human Sexuality midterm as well. She sounded a bit nervous and used a pseudonym from the start. When she did not show up at our agreed upon meeting time I was disappointed. I called her to remind her about our appointment and left a message on her answering machine. She called me a few days later and explained that she had been ill. We set up another time and I awaited our meeting.

Again, my instinct was on target. Aurora seemed nervous and I felt a need to create a comfortable atmosphere for her. I realized as our conversation continued that she felt uncomfortable with herself and that she wanted to talk about this and be listened to. My journal entry after our conversation attests to this feeling.

> This interview moved me more than any so far. I felt spent after it was over. There were so many times I wanted to jump in and reassure Aurora that she was okay. She really places a lot of importance on physical attractiveness in her sex life. When she isn't feeling attractive, it isn't happening. I wanted to reach out - I could have cried myself. So many experiences of mine echoed hers - the older girls calling her a slut, feeling like sex (intercourse) was my "duty" as a girlfriend. I think that's why I responded so emotionally. After she left, I shut the door, took a deep breath, and a few tears ran down my face. I'm really wondering about the experience she didn't want to share. I think that may have affected her sexual expression in a negative way as well - she suggested it wasn't supposed to happen. I don't know if I want to pry any further - this seems pretty closed for her. I also have to draw a boundary - I'm not her therapist, I just want to know her stories as she wants to tell them. (Green Journal, August 9, 1995)

I sensed that she approached our meeting as a place to talk about sexual issues that were troubling her. This orientation is evident in the narrative threads that I elucidated from our conversation.

Aurora's threads are unique because of the role our interchange played for her. After re-imagining what I had interpreted several times, I came to see our conversation in this way. Aurora presented me with her main issue at the beginning of our discourse: "I'm not a sexual being anymore". The statement and exploration of this issue provided a web of meaning for the three-part story she told about sexual intercourse: "We were told that it was bad but I'd been looking forward to it for so long"; "Well, I'd better do it"; and "It's expected of me and I still feel bad". The synthesis of these threads wove a very different, yet equally as intricate cloth as the ones fabricated in the other conversations.

"I'm not a sexual being anymore"

Aurora thinks she was sexually attractive when she was younger and at the time of her first intercourse. She seemed to take a lot of pride in this fact.

> I've been on several medications lately and I've gained a lot of weight-- I used to weigh 95 pounds. (Conversation 1, p. 1)
>
> When I was in high school, I just thought I was really quite attractive. I weighed 85 pounds for most of the time. (Conversation 1, p. 2)
>
> I was very small when we (husband) started dating and I thought I was attractive. (Conversation 1, p. 11)
>
> Everybody, it seemed, used to comment, "I can't believe you've got no waist!" and they'd always say how attractive I was. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Her sexual identity was, and is, directly related to her view of her sexual attractiveness. This story has played itself out over time.

She experienced the double-edged sword of women's sexuality by both Bouris (1994) and Rubin (1991) -- saint or slut. The older girls in her high school expressed jealousy at her popularity with the guys.

> I did have a reputation at school, but I didn't do anything, there was a couple of girls that didn't like me so they figured, "Well, let's get some rumors started." (*SD: I come from a small town and that sounds like a very familiar story*) Well, the high school I went to, I go back now and everybody's still the same, so I'm glad I left but I had some really hard times because of those girls. (*SD: Was it all made-up stuff or had you had a little bit of a sexual relationship with some guys but never to the point of intercourse?*) I liked to kiss a lot so I kissed guys at parties and stuff like that. What had happened is I dated 2 guys that were older and they were older as well, these girls, and I think they thought that I was invading in their territory so they tried to do anything in their power to stop it. I remember there was this one guy, Mike, I thought I was just in love with him, and I did go fairly far with him. I never had sex with him and I remember the

> girls always telling everybody that I'd had sex with him so I suppose there was some reason to have that. But I never did sleep with anyone and I was always called the slut, at least by these girls, and then what happened is I dated this guy named Keith and you didn't mess with Keith. So no one ever said anything anymore, 'cause he was the big guy, until we broke up and then they thought they could say things again but he still stood up for me, he was actually quite a good friend for quite a few years. (*SD: It sounds like you were around grade 9?*) I was in grade 10 and those guys were in grade 12. When I first went to high school in grade 9 I was kinda ignored by everybody and then I started hanging out with this girl, Cara, who was in grade 12, and started dating a couple of those guys. But Keith was good to me. I didn't realize how good he was but he used to stick up for me all the time. It was the grade 12 girls that were spreading rumors about me and he used to always tell them to either shut up or else. (Conversation 1, pp. 8-9)

This is a story with which I am well-acquainted. I still remember agonizing over what Cindy and her groupies would say next at school.

Aurora described liking and even loving several different guys before her marriage. She told me, "Mike, I thought I was just in love with him...Then I dated this guy, Keith,...In grade 12, somebody told Jake that I liked him and he liked me so we went out and I remember we kissed one night and so we started going out...I started dating this other guy, Brian, while I was in BC...I liked some of my husband's friends but they were killed in a canoe accident while I was gone...Stephan was the hardest because I was in love with him and probably because he did die I still am...I had been seeing Jake off and on and finally I asked him what his intentions were and he didn't wanna be together anymore so I thought 'I better take this opportunity while I have it' and I started dating my husband" (Conversation 1). She experienced what she thought was love more than once.

Her story gained even greater meaning when we explored what it meant to her to be a woman.

> I don't know. I suppose having children, and the reason I'm on these medications is because I have endometriosis and so they've been telling me that my chances of having kids are not very good. This has been going on for 7 years and they said the longer that you wait to have children, the worse your chances are, so I think I'm getting to that point. I know I'm not gonna have a kid for 4 or 5 years, until I'm done school anyways, so I think that's part of it as well.
>
> *So a lot of you seeing yourself as a woman links up to your fertility...*
>
> Part to that and the way I look. When I was in high school, I just thought I was really quite attractive. I weighed 85 pounds for most of the time and now that I've gained all the weight it totally affects the way that I think about myself. My

> husband brought it up last night that's probably why I'm talking about it today. (Conversation 1, pp. 1-2)

Beauty and fertility seem to constitute her identity as a woman and a sexual being. Finding out she had endometriosis and gaining weight as result of taking medication stripped her of her sexual identity.

This loss of identity seems to have had an impact on her relationship with her husband.

> When I kissed Jake and stuff I always got the tingly feeling in my stomach and I don't get that with my husband anymore, so sometimes I'm wondering do I miss that? Do I miss him? Or is it just that Jamie and I have been together for so long now that it's supposed to go away, that tingly feeling? (Conversation 1, p. 5)

Later on, she questioned her intuition about the tingly feeling. I asked her whether she thought she fell in love quickly.

> Probably I thought that I was in love but it was just the tingly in the stomach feeling. (Conversation 1, p. 10)

She seems to have trusted herself and that instinct more fully as the young, attractive Aurora.

Messages from others in her life have reinforced her belief that she is unattractive and asexual after gaining weight.

> *How do you think of yourself as a sexual person?*
>
> I don't know, with gaining weight and everything it's totally changed how I think of myself. I don't think of myself as being sexual, and I have a hard time with my husband now because I think, "Why is he even looking at me?" because I've gained so much weight. I was very small when we started dating and I thought I was attractive then but I don't find myself attractive anymore, so basically I don't think I'm a sexual being anymore. Every once in awhile I do it with my husband because he needs it.
>
> *So it sounds like you connect a lot of being sexual with being attractive?*
>
> I think so. My brother-in-law just got married to a girl, and at the rehearsal dinner she gave everybody gifts and they were all lingerie. I opened up mine and it was a camisole and pair of shorts and the size was extra large. So everybody it seems that I'm around is telling me about my weight. She was making her point that she thought I needed to lose weight and when I go home my mom says that I should lose weight. Jamie every once in awhile if I catch him on a bad day, he'd say, "Don't eat that, you should lose weight" and it seems like appearance is important to everybody else. It's important to me, too, but it's outta my hands right now.

> *It sounds like you think you were more attractive at the time that you met your husband and when you had your relationship with Jake?*
>
> Well everybody, it seemed, used to comment, "I can't believe you've got no waist" and they'd always say how I attractive I was, and now no one says anything. And if they do, it's, "Lose weight" or "Want a salad?" type thing. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

She did not feel sexual anymore. I think that is a large part of the reason that she decided to share her stories with me. Her description of this issue set a backdrop for the trilogy she narrated about the role of intercourse in her life.

"We were told that it was bad but I'd been looking forward to it for so long"

Aurora heard conflicting messages about sexuality from her parents, her friends and television. As children, she and her two sisters were told that sex was bad.

> Well we were told that it was bad, and I always felt bad. When I had my first experience I just thought I was horrible but yet I'd been looking forward to it for so long. Mom was a sex education teacher but she never said anything about it to any of us. One of my sisters got pregnant out of wedlock and she was older than me and that's when finally things started. I was just out of high school and she was saying to me, "I suppose you're sexually active now, too" and I finally said it wasn't any of her business. So we were always told it was bad and I think that's the way I felt for a long time, a long time.
>
> *Do you remember any specific incidents where maybe that message came through some kind of talk you had with your parents or ...*
>
> I remember once I was with my mom and my sisters in the car and we were parked out front of some place and waiting and all of the sudden mom goes, "If a man ever tries to put his thing in your mouth that you make sure that you run away!" I thought, "Well, if he does that then he's really bad and *it's* really bad!" I didn't even know what it was and all of the sudden she was talking about it. I don't know if she was talking about it for my benefit or for my sisters', I just remember them always saying that, you waited 'til you're married and that was the most important thing. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

When I asked her about her expectations for the first time she explained

> I had a girlfriend that was older and she said you have to wait until you're 18. So 3 days after my 18th birthday I had sex, and I was just wanting to get rid of it. I just thought that it was something that you had to get rid of and it seemed like everybody else was doing it and so I thought it was just gonna be this thing that everybody said was wonderful and it wasn't (*laughing*).
>
> *Where did you get these expectations it would be wonderful?*

> I don't know, maybe TV. I had one girlfriend that was sexually active when she was 16 and she used to tell me all these things. I got my education from her. She lived in BC at the time so like when she'd come to visit I learned things. She said that it was wonderful and everything like that, and I suppose TV portrays it as being wonderful. (Conversation 1, pp. 4-5)

Despite her mother's messages that sex was bad, she was still looking forward to a wonderful experience.

"Well, I'd better do it"

Even though she talked about wanting to have intercourse because she thought it would be wonderful, she did not express this as her main motivation for having intercourse the first time.

> Okay, when I was in grade 9 I went from elementary school to a high school and there was kind of a boy I liked. So I told one of my friends and he liked me, so we started dating and he kissed me and then we broke up. Then in grade 12, I thought he was kind of cute again, and so somebody told him that I liked him and he liked me again so we went out. I remember we kissed one night and it was, you know you get the tingly in your stomach and everything like that and so we started going out. We dated for five months. I thought I was so much in love and he loved me and everything, and it ended up that after grade 12 I was moving to BC with a girlfriend, so I was leaving in August, so we decided that we should probably have sex before I left. (Conversation 1, p. 4)

She commented later on

> I don't know why had to do it before I left. If he was gonna be there, why didn't I wait until I came back? So I guess I was trying to get him to stay committed to me and to be close to him, and I just thought after a relationship progressed to a certain point, you know, you had to have sex. (Conversation 1, p. 5)

Her description of how it happened had a similar sub-text of disbelief as some of the her-stories I had read.

> I remember we were at a party because one of our friends was moving to Texas and his (Jake's) parents were gone, I can't remember where. I remember I didn't have anything to drink and neither did he, and my parents were out at the farm. We went over to his house and we were kissing and stuff and I remember we went into his bedroom. It's hard to remember how exactly it happened because to me it was, "I can't believe I just did that" type thing, so it was a blur, but I remember just somehow we were naked and he was on top of me. (Conversation 1, p. 8)

I was interested in knowing her thoughts afterward.

> I remember thinking to myself, "I can't believe I did this" and then thinking that everybody was gonna know just by looking at me. I had so many different feelings it wasn't even funny and I was glad that it was gone and it was over with and that I had actually had done it. He was happy but it did nothing for me

> sexually, and I remember just thinking, laying there, going, "I can't believe I did this - what are my parents gonna think?" (*laughing*)
>
> *And then, compared to that, now do you still feel the same, you can't believe you did it?*
>
> You know, I don't really know how I feel. Looking back, I don't know why I did it. I suppose just so everybody would think I was cool, because that was one of the things. Just to be closer to him--I don't really know how I think about it. Sometimes I think about it and it was okay and sometimes I think, "Well, I shouldn't have ever done that" but it's over with and I can't do anything about it. I look at this way, I waited 'til I was 18, most of my friends were having sex when they were 15 so I don't feel so bad that way, I guess (*laughing*).
>
> *So that sounds like something that's important to you, that you waited until you were 18, that it does help you feel a little bit better to know that you did wait that long...*
>
> Yeah, I waited and I was in the relationship 5 months prior. So, I think that was important, too. I think most people probably would've waited a lot longer but I was waiting, so I thought, "Well, I'd better do it." (Conversation 1, p. 6)

The idea that sex was something that she should do carried on into her other sexual relationships. When I asked her about her relationships between Jake and her husband Jamie she told this story.

> When I was in BC after Jake and I broke up, I did start dating this other guy. His name was Brian, and of course again I thought, "Well, I slept with Jake, I have to sleep with him". So I slept with him, and he said that he was completely in love with me. I had to move back because I had a fight with the girl I was living with. Brian called one day and I had been seeing Jake off and on and he said, "I'm coming to see you". So he came to see me and I remember going to a party with him and just leaving him in a corner and partying with all my friends. I was really mean to him but I remember that he brought me some sexy lingerie from BC. I told him to take it back because I thought it was disgusting. It was just thong underwear! I remember he wanted to sleep with me, and I didn't want to, but I did anyways just so he'd leave me alone. I remember just going, "Please hurry up!" (*laughing*) and then that was it. There was one guy, Garett, that I don't want to talk about. That was in BC and that wasn't supposed to happen. (Conversation 1, p. 7)

She shared a similar story about her premarital sexual relationship with her husband.

> If hadn't have slept with Jake I wouldn't have slept with my husband so soon after. It pushed me into a sexual relationship faster with my husband. I thought, well now that I've done it once it's expected of me and I have to do it again. I think I was trying to get close to him right away again so I could get over Jake. (Conversation 1, p. 5)

Somehow she was under the notion that giving sex was her duty as a girlfriend. I had this impression as well as a sixteen year old. We talked about that.

> *I'm questioning my own beliefs about the place of intercourse in my relationships--that it was something like you're a girlfriend, you do this, you know, it's your...* (D: Duty! *[laughing]*) *Yeah, kind of duty, which is a scary way of looking at it* (D: Yeah). (Conversation 1, p. 6)

Having sex with her partner was a large part of her role as a girlfriend. It came to be an expectation about which she has great apprehension.

"It's expected of me and I still feel bad"

When I asked her why her parents' messages about the depravity of sexual intercourse were so meaningful for her, she illustrated just how profoundly those convictions affect her sexuality now.

> It's affected my relationship with my husband. I still think I'm bad, yet I'm married, so it should be good but I'm still bad. My sisters and I finally talk about it. "Oh, I don't wanna hear that!" I always say but they've had the same problems. My eldest sister, after she got married she didn't have sex with her husband until 3 months later because she just couldn't. My other sister, she's the one that got pregnant, so it seemed she had a little easier time but with me it's just I do it, I feel like I do it because I have to and it's expected of me and I still feel bad afterwards. (Conversation 1, p. 3)

When I asked her later on if the harassment from the grade 12 girls might contribute to her guilt, she was not able to pinpoint the source of feeling bad.

> I don't know where I get the feeling that I have now, because I'm married, so that's one thing that mom and dad approve of. They love my husband, so that's another thing. I just don't get it. I suppose it has partly to do with that but I look back on a lot of things I used to do and think, "Why, why did I ever do that?" and I guess it was just the people I was involved with. I don't know if it's related to high school or just my parents. I can't figure it out. (Conversation 1, p. 9)

I tried to help her figure it out.

> *I'm gonna make a little jump here and you can tell me if I'm out of line, but I'm wondering how you feel about how you started your relationship with your husband?*
>
> I kinda feel bad because he still doesn't know that I asked permission from an ex-boyfriend to date him. When I first started dating my husband we had a few problems. The thing is the summer going into grade 12, a friend committed suicide, and Jamie was really good friends with him as well, and I was just doing anything to get close to one of his friends that knew him so that I could find out more about him. There was 6 of them that hung around together in my husband's group and 3 of them died and so after the last 2 died I think I tried to get even closer to Jamie because he was one of the only one left. Jamie and I

> did break up once because I was at a cabaret and was loaded and kissed the brother of one of the guys who'd died. I think I still feel bad about that and every once in awhile when there's a nasty argument it comes up. But I suppose there's a little bit guilt there, and Jamie and I never would be together if his friends hadn't have died because I was always hitting on them (*laughing*)! (Conversation 1, pp. 9-10)

Although she knows that she loves her husband (Conversation 1, p. 10) she does not get that tingly feeling with him anymore (Conversation 1, p. 5) and now she only does it with him because he needs it (Conversation 1, p. 11). It seems that her loss of sexual identity has a lot to do with her current sexual persona.

> *How do you think of yourself as a sexual person?* Asexual [*laughing*]! (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Questioning Herself

It was obvious that Aurora had come to our conversation to tell more than a few anecdotes about her sexuality. I felt unsettled by her despondent tone. The tears that slid down my cheeks after she left are my witnesses. When I took a chance to think again about our conversation, I realized that she had not been asking me for advice. I think she simply needed a safe place to question herself. Because I was not connected with her friends or family and I assured her confidentiality, our conversation provided that place. She confirmed my instinctive feeling-- "I just wanted to tell someone and not be judged" (Conversation 2). She needed validation.

She saw our interchange as a means of verbalizing some internalized questions. This fits in with my feeling that she was doubting her own intuition. It also conforms to her expression of uncertainty about her sexuality. When I last spoke to her, she had recently heard from Jake. He called to apologize for how he had acted during the time of their breakup. She appreciated this perhaps because there was some closure on that relationship. I also sensed she was more at peace than last August. She told me that she had lost some weight, that she was no longer taking a lot of the medications and that "things are much better now". I was sincerely gladdened to hear this.

Luis

I recognized Luis when he called me to participate in the study. I had just supervised the midterm exam and had noted the name on his optical scan sheet because of the interesting tie he was wearing. He called hours after the class and sounded very casual about participating. He also said that his roommate, Terry, would like to talk with me as well. When I ensured him of the confidentiality of his call, he was casual, that it would not matter if anyone knew. I wondered if he was taking me and my research seriously. When I called him to set up a conversation, I again got the impression that telling his story was not a big deal to him. I decided to go ahead with the conversation despite this feeling. His appearance matched the casual tone of his voice on the phone--cutoff jean shorts, a sweatshirt and a ball cap. He spoke to the point with ease. Although he was not a verbose storyteller, he shared the significance of his experiences with me in his own unique way.

Unlike my experience with the other three participants, I did not have an emotional reaction after our conversation. Then, I thought it was because he did not say very much. Now I have come to realize that because we do not share similar stories, I did not identify with him as intensely. Perhaps that is why our conversation was shorter than the others. He also admitted that "as long as I have questions that will direct me, I can talk about it" (Conversation 1, p. 5). Luis told three stories: "Nothing really major has impacted my sexuality"; "I was ready to share myself with her"; and "I'm not a typical male". Although these stories overlap and intersect, they appeared to me as three distinct threads.

"Nothing really major has impacted my sexuality"(?)

I recreate my most vivid picture of Luis when I read his response to my question about the role of sexuality in his childhood. He was leaning back in his chair, hands behind his head with elbows out, one ankle over the other knee. He was nonchalant.

> When I was a kid, well, I guess it was a source of great exploration, because you go, "Hmm, hey, that feels good when I touch it" and I guess everyone goes through that stage of thumbing through a Playboy. I thought it was normal and healthy to tell you the truth. Of course, my parents didn't say a word about sex to me, except my dad--he's more in tune with us. When my sister was reaching of age, he gave her a book, "Everything You Want to Know About Sex but Were Afraid to Ask", and the funny thing was he didn't give that to me when I was reaching that age, you know, "He's a guy, he's got to figure this shit out for himself". But it was kind of neat, because I was curious and I was snooping around my sister's room and I found this book and it was like "Hey, cool book" so I'm reading through this book and I'm like "Hey, that's why I do that a lot!" (Conversation 1, p. 2)

He did not seem to attach a lot of importance to his childhood experiences: both his language and his tone of voice suggested this to me. I decided to probe further and ask him if he remembered any significant experiences from when he was a child that seemed to have had an impact on his sexual development.

> To tell you the truth, not really, I was a very shy boy. I didn't really start dating until high school. Junior high I was just let's play sports, let's have fun, but then high school came along, it was more "Hey, this dating thing is cool - hey, she's cute" type of thing. But reaching back in my early childhood I really can't remember much, except for masturbating, that's about it. I do remember the first time I ever saw a girl in her frontal parts was when I was about 4 years old, and she's here, "Do you wanna see this?" "Okay...Cool," "Can I see yours?" "Okay..." so it's just once of those exchangeable things but nothing major. I can't really elaborate any more. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

When I asked him if these experiences were very meaningful to him, and why, he concluded that they were not.

> Masturbating--I used to think that was bad. I come from a strong Catholic family to begin with but that's about it. Just thumbing through a Playboy was like, "Hey, this is cool!" I'm not sure how much impact it actually had because it's just dispersed throughout TV and whatnot. Okay, that's a Playboy, oh, that's a girl kissing another dude on the TV set. Nothing really major has actually impacted me. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

After briefly noting a few incidents, he said that nothing had really impacted him. It became obvious as he continued to speak that his experiences growing up *had* affected his sexual development: "I've always been taught that this is a sacred thing, not necessarily that you're married but that you really care for the person and you seriously want to be committed to this person, and I was ready to share myself with her" (Conversation 1, p. 4). Could his denial of the impact of early sexual experiences have anything to do with his Catholic upbringing? I tried to probe further, with no luck. I felt some disappointment that he was not responding in the way that I had hoped but yet I did not feel that he was hiding anything. He had said what he wanted to say. This was the way that he told his story. And remembering that it was *his* story, I decided to flow with his style.

"I wanted to share myself with her"

As we talked about the situation leading up to his first intercourse, his nonchalance gradually gave way to reveal a complex and caring young man. I think the best way to illustrate that is to include the excerpt of our conversation in which we talked about his first time.

> *Can you tell me about the situation that led up to and included your first intercourse - the general progression?*
>
> It was after my first year of university. Actually it was in my first year of university because I went to engineering and did a semester and it was like, "Holy Shit! This is not me", so I took a summer off, and from there met my first true, true girlfriend that I'd actually call a girlfriend. We'd do stuff together, we'd do a relationship type of thing. I'm not sure if it was love, I think it's more infatuation but there were qualities of love in that. We progressed into kissing, petting and all that stuff and she'd always want to and I'd be going, "I'm not sure if I'm ready" and she was just thrown aback and (*SD: [laughing] You're not supposed to do that, you're a man!*) Exactly, I was supposed to be aggressive, but I'm a shy, very passive person, I kept telling her, and things progress. I think that got her more interested because I was denying her: "This guy's a gentleman" type of thing. I guess after awhile, there was a perfectly set weekend, and I'm thinking to myself, "Well, I do care for this person a lot, and I've been grappling with the terms of love, I'm not sure if I love her but these strong feelings are pretty damn close." That's at the time--right now I'm thinking it was more like infatuation, but at the time I was thinking, "Yes, I think I'm falling for this girl big time!" This is on my birthday so it gets more emotional. So I had my birthday and it was fun. The next weekend was the weekend of my first intercourse. It was kind of neat because the Friday we took off to Calgary together to watch the Phantom of the Opera. There was this beautifully set thing. I was very romantic. Well, I showered her with flowers for the whole weekend, and she was just taken aback going, "Wow, this guy is cool!" Then the Saturday following, I cooked a romantic dinner. It was a seven course meal, it took the bloody day, and then had a bottle of wine, had dinner, and then she said, "Well, I'm kind of in the mood for something..." I said, "The mood for what?" I was just being a putz you know, just seeing what she would do, it was a little game. I'm like, "Are you sure about this?" and she goes, "Yeah" and I go, "Well, actually, I think I'm ready." We did our thing, then afterwards was the first time, actually the only time I ever said those three words to a woman, and she expressed the same and that's why I really think that was very special to me. Actually it's one of the dearest moments that I've had.
>
> *What kind of expectations did you have about the first time, and what do you think influenced those expectations?*
>
> Well in high school I did a lot of experimentation, watching porno's, and I just thought I'd be God-like, going for hours at a time (*laughing*) you know going, "Oh, that guy's cool!" But it wasn't like that at all. It was more me going, "Oh, I'm actually doing this, holy shit!" So that was one expectation, that it would be

just like the films I saw. She'd be screaming a lot more...I don't know, just sharing myself with her actually was a really explicit expectation that actually was fulfilled. I've always been taught that this is a sacred thing, not necessarily that you're married but that you really care for the person and you seriously want to be committed to this person, and I was ready to share myself with her. I feel that making love to someone is actually like making love mentally, the physical part is just superficial and I thought that experience was that total sharing of feelings and it was just a wondrous experience.

You said you learned that it was supposed to be sacred, where did you learn that from? Or is it just a general "out there" thing?

Well, actually my sister had a lot to do with the way I perceived females and the way I should perceive sex. She said, "Whatever you do, just make sure you are mentally in tune with this girl, and make sure that you wholeheartedly want to do this with this girl because it is your first time and it is one of those sacred, first experiences that's gonna shape you" and I was like "Whoa" (*laughing*) I might not perform.

That's interesting - you talked about at the time perceiving it as love and now maybe thinking that it was actually infatuation, do you think that your perception of that event has changed over time? From when it happened to now?

I don't know, because I'm thinking to myself I was lucky in my first experience with intercourse. A lot of my friends said, "Well, I was drunk", you know, "I boned her in the back seat of my car", I didn't want my first time to be like that. I didn't want it to be something that's just meaningless and I wanted it to be special with someone that I thought was special at the time. For that, it was something that I really hold dearly, actually, because it is one of those growing things that you go through. It wasn't a big conquest. It was one of those personal achievements, because I reached a plateau, or a stage in my life where I felt I was mature; not physically but more the mental state, saying, "Hey, I think I can have a relationship."

So my understanding is that at the time it was very important to you, and you still see it that way. (L: Yes, definitely) *If I wanted to learn more about what the significance of your first intercourse has had in your life, how could I find out more about the role it's played in your life and what I mean by that is I'm letting you be creative with the "How" - in what ways could you show me, tell me more about the significance it's had?*

More shaping the relationships that I've had afterwards, because each relationship that I've had has become more mature, more in tune with the more mental parts of the relationship than the physical attraction, like, "A-ooga! Wow, she's cute!" That way it's made me more mature and my relationships since then have been more mature. I've been more creative in my courting of a girl, and I guess my main goal after my first intercourse is to make sure that the person I'm with actually feels the same way that I do about her. I try to focus on

> the atmosphere of the relationship more than the sex part. The sex part just gets better from that, I find. (Conversation 1, pp. 4-5)

I did get the impression that his first time had been a special experience. I did not pick it up during the conversation, but later on I was intrigued that he had talked about his first time as being a personal achievement, reaching some sense of mental maturity and the feeling that he was ready to have a relationship. This to me was an interesting plot twist on the "doing it" thread in the his-stories of first intercourse represented in research and literary interpretations. Not what I expected after his casual beginnings. Later on in my interpretation process, a committee member suggested that the focus on the atmosphere of the relationship was more for his sake than his partners'. His sister's messages and the pornographic films, as well as his experience dealing with sexual assault survivors (described in the next thread) may have played a large role in his feeling that he had to create a romantic atmosphere.

"I'm not a typical male"

The fact that his story was not characteristic meshed with his insistence that he was not a typical male. It almost seemed like he was trying to prove his exceptionality to me. When I asked him what it meant to him to be a man or to be a male, he expressed his discontent with the male stereotype.

> Well, the stereotypical societal thing is to be the breadwinner, to be the strong figure, but for me, I don't know what it's like to be male. There's so many stereotypes out there that I haven't really explored that aspect of being male. I think I possess a lot of feminine qualities, and I hate to say that because why is it so male and female? But for me to be male is just someone who's there, someone who is strong and able to help people, then again all of these qualities do mix up with the female qualities as well, so to tell you the truth, I have no clue what a male is supposed to be. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

He indicated his indignation with the flippant use of the term "typical male".

> I actually get offended when people go, "Typical males", and I'm in the room going "What does that mean?" That really gets my goat because what is a typical male? Maybe increased testosterone levels--when I was in high school there was a whole bunch of hockey players and they had that mentality "Let's go to the bar and fight or fuck" type of thing, and they'd just be aggressive to other males, and they were always talking about cars or something like that. I was never really big on that: it kind of disturbed me. I have a group of friends that are not really big on "let's show this" type of thing, and it bugs me when girls associate me with being a typical male. If I'm in the room, and they say, "Typical male", and point at some other dude, I go, "Whoa, maybe he has qualities but, geez, I'm a male, too, come on now!" (Conversation 1, p. 2)

I wonder how much my previous comment had to do with his response.

> *The next question I want to ask you, and I always wonder if men respond to this really well-- how can I know because I'm a woman?-- but if I ask you what does it mean to you to be a man or to be a male, could you describe that?* (Conversation 1, p. 2)

I was intending to communicate that I acknowledged my gender lens but I may have inadvertently communicated to him that I did not think men were capable of speaking about meaning and identity.

When Luis described himself as a person, he revealed a depth of character that belied my initial impression that he might not be "serious".

> My internal qualities, well, that's sort of still in limbo. I think school is one of those places where you find yourself. A lot of my development happened in residence. I experienced being a student leader and I was also in an executive position on an association, and throughout that time I had so many various situations that occurred that have just totally changed my outlook about how life really works. I had many experiences with girls and how they come and approach you with problems that they have. They disclose that they were sexually abused when they were children or else, one time that really got my goat was a date rape that happened. Just facing those situations and helping them through it, and finding resources for them helped me just go, "Wow, everything's not really as like they are on TV," and there's more to people than you actually see, because a lot of stuff influences them. That just made me think, and it's just opened my mind to all of the possibilities. So right now I figure that I'm still developing myself. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

I continued by asking him what kind of skills or qualities he thought he had to have to deal with those situations, he again exposed the extent of his character.

> What I found really useful is just being attentive basically, and interactively talking to them and making sure that you clarify and paraphrase what they say and make sure you're right about or you have a good sense of what they're talking about, as well as just a good understanding of what it would feel like. I always put myself in their situation and try to think of, "How would I feel if someone did that to me?" I just think of all of the ramifications and just be sympathetic to that and just put their feelings first. We learned all this type of communication stuff and facilitation stuff and I've been termed by all of my friends as a really good listener and someone who's always dependable to be there if they want to talk. I've gotten many phone calls at like three, four in the morning, my friends in distress going "God, Luis, I wanna shoot my head off" type of thing. That happened a couple of times. The first time was in high school. Someone disclosed to me that they wanted to commit suicide, and that was like "woo..." that took me back a bit because my only experience with suicide is maybe the odd thought, but nothing major. Everyone goes through that type of state. In high school I learned a little bit about the signs of suicide but when it happens the first time, you're there, you go, "Woo, this guy's really

> serious about doing it" and I'm thinking to myself, "Okay, what's the best thing to do?" (Conversation 1, pp. 1-2)

In this ardent description of himself, I sensed that he wanted to convince me of his positive characteristics. It was important to him that I take him seriously.

Developing Himself

As I interpreted and re-interpreted our conversation I was able to see Luis as more than nonchalant. He appeared unconcerned and casual because he was being so forthright about what he said. Did he think that I was expecting that type of response? Is he usually so candid? I think he revealed more than he realized. He showed me more than one side of himself: the curious but shy child; the caring lover; and the helper and listener. He described himself as still developing and specifically developing his caring nature. He emphasized this in his words about his first time.

> Just sharing myself with her was a really explicit expectation that actually was fulfilled. I've always been taught that this is a sacred thing, not necessarily that you're married but that you really care for the person and you seriously want to be committed to this person, and I was ready to share myself with her. I thought that experience was that total sharing of feelings and it was just a wondrous experience. (Conversation 1, p. 4)

I have to admit that I was pleasantly surprised. Although I had not expected that men would talk about first intercourse and their sexual partner as unimportant, many people that I discussed my research with, especially women, thought that men would focus more on the physical rather than emotional aspect of first intercourse. I now had some substantial evidence that they are not all "typical males".

Tam

I was not surprised when Tam approached me to be involved in my research. I had noticed him in the sexuality class because of his unique hairstyle--shorn close to his head, dark brown with blonde tips. The day that I told the class about my study, he stayed afterward and discussed certain issues about the exam with the instructor and some other students. As I listened to him, I intuitively knew he would be an engaging storyteller. A couple of weeks later, I encountered him at the wedding of a good female friend. He was a schoolmate of the groom. He told me that night that he had intended to call me to be involved. We agreed that he would call me after the long weekend to set up a meeting time.

Tam was a real joker at the wedding, at one point dancing to seventies disco in the bride's veil. He did not disappoint in our conversation. For two and a half hours, he vivaciously recounted several reminiscences from his childhood, from a three year relationship and from more recent experiences. I asked him a few times if he would like to stop and continue another time and he told me "It's fine for me as long as you're okay" (Conversation 1, p. 18). I had to leave for an appointment shortly after we were finished and I wrote quickly in my journal, only two sentences.

> He was an excellent storyteller. He will be a great participant. (Green Journal, August 11, 1995).

Because of the sheer length of our conversation, it took me some time to interpret Tam's narrations. After much reflection I elucidated three central stories: "I would call myself a ladies' man"; "I loved her, she loved me, there was no way things weren't gonna work out"; and "Something good's gonna happen because you're a good person".

"I would call myself a ladies' man"

Tam's father left when he was 13 years old. He felt that "it was the best for mom, it was probably the best for the family" (Conversation 1, p. 1).

> My parents are separated, so I'm living with my mom and my brother, and I don't see my dad all that often. I kind of like to keep it that way, because he was an alcoholic and he smokes a lot and my brother's allergic to smoke. Him and dad didn't get along too well. There was a lot of, I can't really say abuse, but my dad was a tough love kind of guy-- you did this and you did it or you get a spanking. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

As we talked about incidents in his childhood, he spoke again about the discipline style of his father. One afternoon, his mother caught him naked in bed with a girl. He was eight or nine at the time. He said he felt bad about what he was doing because he did not want to get caught.

> *It sounds like you're saying you instinctively knew that it was bad. Were you getting any message from your parents?*
>
> They never overtly said anything about it. They didn't say to do it, so if you do it then it has the possibility of being very wrong, and then you could get in big trouble for it, so you just hide it or you don't do it.
>
> *So it sounds like you were in the habit then of doing what your parents said.*
>
> Yeah, I was a real momma's boy, or whatever you'd call it. It was pretty strict around our house when dad was around so, you did what you were told to do or you got a licking. (Conversation 1, p. 6)

I picked up on his use of the term "momma's boy". It carried the traditional meaning of "wimp" but I sensed something deeper. He was his mother's boy because he identified more with her than his father.

> When my father left, and while he was around, I told myself that I wasn't gonna be like him-- alcohol-wise, just his whole ideology on things-- that was a big thing for me. I don't want to be like my father. (Conversation 1, p. 3).

Tam described himself as a ladies' man in contrast to his father, whom he felt was a man's man. He was quick to qualify what he meant by "ladies' man".

> My dad, I think he's a man's man and a traditional man's man. I would call me a ladies' man-- I can't say that because I sleep around or anything but I feel more comfortable with women, talking to them, in their company, that might be because I grew up most with my mom, and you have to relate to women (Conversation 1, p. 3).

The "momma's boy" became a "ladies' man". He explained that he did have a father figure come into his life, a basketball coach who was a tough love guy like his father. He said he was "an honest and fair man, too--he would listen to you" (Conversation 1, p. 4). He knows that his mother appreciated the coach's support in raising him.

I was curious about his current connections with men other than his father.

> *How do you feel about your connections with other men in your life right now? I guess I'm thinking about the old "boys' night out", or male bonding-- what kind of meaning does that stuff have for you, being with men and spending time with men?*
>
> It's important, all my close friends are guys-- well, I can't say all, but my core group and we do the guys' night out thing, there are nights when you don't want to have girls around, you just want to hang out and sit around and talk or do whatever, and I don't see myself having a problem dealing with men or associating with men, I have a problem I think maybe when it's dealing with older men, that portray the same image as my father had-- if you're a redneck oil rigger, there's a chance I'm going to be pretty shy about becoming talkative with you. If you're a lawyer, then I wouldn't really have a problem, I mean as long as you're a decent person I wouldn't mind talking to you. Older men, grandfathers, I never had a grandfather, so I didn't know how to relate to older men. I've had grandmothers, I still do, and I lived with my mom, so I can do the whole range with women. But with men, I seem to miss some of the jokes, not share the same point of view so the jokes don't mean anything to me. Then you kind of have to do the ha-ha laugh anyways otherwise you really don't fit in and then you can't talk to them at all. My age is fine, and I get along with my friends' fathers. (Conversation 1, p. 4)

Although he valued his relationships with men who are similar to him, he again accentuated his comfort with women.

His affinity with women evolved into a deep respect for girls and women. It seems to have been fostered by his relationship with his mother.

> My mom is great. When they first separated, she was always making sure we were okay. Nothing ever came up about how she was doing. If she was doing without she never mentioned anything. It was just "make sure the kids are okay", and it's been like that ever since. (Conversation 1, p. 1)

He wanted to emphasize to me that he and his friends were different from other guys. They showed consideration for girls.

> There were stories going around school about this guy slept with this girl and she bled all over the sheets and he had to burn the sheets and they were all kind of girl-bashing stories; and I didn't talk to anybody about what Catherine and I did. That's just not the kind of guy I am, and my friends aren't that way with their girlfriends, and a lot of the things in high school was, "Do it so you can tell your friends about it." (Conversation 1, p. 11)

> I wasn't under peer pressure to have sex because that's not how my group of guys worked. (Conversation 1, p. 18)

Tam chronicled with remarkable detail several sexual firsts in his life: seeing his elementary-school-aged female neighbour naked; his grade four crush; discovering masturbation by accident; his first attempt at flirting; his agonizing grade nine prom date; and his first kiss in grade 10 in the girls' locker room. It seems that these firsts were very important to him. He explained

> For me a kiss is a big step. A lot of people nowadays probably don't think so. When I mean to kiss someone, it means a lot when it's in the context and it's very, very hard for me to allow my emotions to come out that much. (Conversation 1, p. 18)

A large part of the importance of these first experiences was the female involved and his feelings for her. He spoke with affection and appreciation about the experiences they shared.

Tam demonstrated his caring for women in his relationship with Catherine, his first sexual partner. It seems he saw himself and his enjoyment as secondary. This was very evident in his description of his first intercourse.

> I don't even know if it was half-way in, and she said, "Oh, that's it, you gotta take it out, that's just too much" it's like "Okay" and it was boom, out, the condom was off, "Are you okay? Are you sure?" and I was so scared for her. I really didn't care much about myself at all. I was really worried about her, how she was feeling. I was kinda secondary at that point and then (*SD: It sounds like you expected that it would be painful for the female involved*) Yeah (*SD: That you had heard that*) Yeah, and I was really scared , scared about that. It didn't seem

> like there was much to worry about for the guy, as long as you have the condom on (*SD: Mm-hmm*) you'll be fine. (Conversation 1, p. 11, 18)

He described his first penetration very vividly but cannot remember the first time he went all the way.

> I've thought about this a lot, and for the life of me I don't remember the actual first time that we went all the way. The first penetration, I remember that, but the first time I ejaculated into her I don't remember, and in a way it bothers me because I'd like to remember it. It's kind of frustrating because I want to know exactly what we did the first time, or how many times we did it, or things like that. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

I did not sense that he wanted to remember for the purpose of keeping records. He seemed disappointed that he did not remember this important experience with the woman he loved. When he describes what the first time meant to him, this is evident.

> For us that was like the further step. You say you love somebody and then for us that was like the final step sort of thing. So it kind of progressed the way everyone envisions it to go sort of thing, except we didn't get married before we did it. That was just like the last thing we could share and it was amazing. That's a huge thing to have happen to you while you're a teenager, so it was important and I did become more of a man or think that I felt better about myself, because, "I know this woman loves me so much that she would give herself to me," but as a person I knew what I was doing, who I was, it seemed like a natural progression at the time. (Conversation 1, p. 19)

He also denounced the idea of having sex for sex's sake. This appeared to be because he wanted to have a deeper relationship with his partners. He said that physical sex played a major role in his relationship with Catherine, and this was not how he wanted it to be.

> I saw this as the woman I was gonna marry, and that's not how I wanted it to be, based on sex. I wanted to be able to hang around and talk to our friends at the same time. (Conversation 1, p. 12)

After they eventually broke up, it was two and a half years before he would get involved with another woman. In this relationship he had a similar concern.

> I didn't want to be having sex as much as she did, and I was kinda hitting my head on a wall going, "How do I meet these girls? I don't understand". I felt like the gender roles had completely been reversed. I was getting really, really concerned with that because that's not what I wanted, I didn't want a girlfriend and I didn't want to have sex with her anymore but I didn't know how to tell her that. (Conversation 1, p. 17)

He did not have feelings for Joanne but was afraid of hurting her. He knew that this relationship was only for sex.

> I feel really bad about doing it, because I know the only reason I did it was for sex and that was wrong for me. Knowing that sex was just for sex and then not enjoying it because I didn't care about this person the way I did about Catherine. (Conversation 1, p. 1, 19-20)

Caring was an important element of a sexual relationship. Not your "typical" male.

"I loved her, she loved me, there was no way things weren't gonna work out"

Tam's story of his relationship with Catherine is underscored by two elements of the "ladies' man" thread: his respect for women and his desire to be different than his father. He described this relationship over eight pages of text, needing almost no prompting from me to continue. Two things in particular struck me: that he remembered everything in such detail and that he really included her in his stories.

He started from the beginning and told how he began his relationship with Catherine.

> Shaun said, "I know this girl that likes you. It's Catherine", and I thought, "Oh she's cute" but I had no clue that she was interested in me at all, and I had even thought of her, of anybody as a girlfriend. It just wasn't in my mind. So I phoned her one night at 10, and her father answered the phone and at that point I knew it was too late to call. She came on the phone and she was caught between being so happy that I actually phoned her and getting in trouble from her father for having a guy phone this late. My birthday was coming up in June and I invited her to come out with me and the rest of the guys. (Conversation 1, p. 9)

She couldn't go because of her father, and she was really upset about that. She told him and then ran off down into the girls' locker room. At the prompting of her best friend, he went down into the locker room to talk to her. He cannot remember whether she was crying. They made a little small talk and then it happened.

> I remember she walked up to me and stood right in front of me and said, "Well, I guess this is just about it then, isn't it?" and I said, "What do you mean?" and then she leaned forward and gave me a kiss. I didn't really expect it but it was amazing at the same time, and I was just very impressed with the whole thing--that the girl would kiss *me*. It was like a birthday present in a way, and it was the best one that I had got. (Conversation 1, p. 9)

They started going out soon after his birthday but her parents didn't know about it.

> That was a big problem for me, because we did it for 6 or 7 months, all through the summer we hung out. Coming back into grade 11 in September, I was at the point where I was going to break up with her. Her parents didn't know. I had to

> sneak around, I couldn't do this at certain times, I couldn't phone, I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I told her, "This is just too hard. If your parents don't know then I'm sorry, but I can't do this anymore." (Conversation 1, p. 9)

When her father indicated that he would allow her to have a boyfriend they decided to go out again. After two or three more months went by, they started thinking about sex, because things started getting a little heavier. They wanted to have intercourse because they knew they loved one another. He told me in detail about their preparation for sex.

> She was talking with her friends about going on the pill. She was worried about putting weight on, and she was worried about her parents finding out that she was using it, so we talked about it, and she said that she had decided that she was going to go on the pill before we had sex. She got her pills and started taking them, and she said, "I'm on the pill, I had to go get the pill, you have to get the condoms". So I sucked it up one day and walked into the store with my head down and walked over to the condom rack and really didn't look at it at all. I just kind of reached out and I bought Sheiks. I'd heard of Sheiks before, I'm gonna buy Sheiks. So I walk up to the front and it's an old woman sitting there and it's just like, "Oh...geez..." . I just put them on the counter and at this point I was still not making eye contact. I thought for sure she was gonna do the old, "Hey Jack, how much are these Sheik condoms?" over the intercom and I was so petrified. She just rang them through and I gave her the money and then I had them, so I was happy about that. (Conversation 1, p. 10)

It was apparent that he and Catherine had planned for their first intercourse together to be safe. I could sense the commitment to the relationship in the elaborateness of this planning.

Tam described their "attempt" at the first time in an animated style. I hope this is captured on paper.

> So the month was coming up. She said she had to be on the pill for a month before it would be working right and it was 3 days before the pills ran out. I remember we were at my place and everybody was gone. We were doing the usual kissing, and then things started getting heavier and heavier. I had the condoms then, so I was just, "It's 3 days; what's 3 days?" I kept rubbing it in, and it was like, "Well, just come on" and then she said, "Okay, but you have to pull out before anything happens". At this point I got scared, because I mean it's the first time for me and for her and all of the stories going around school about this guy slept with this girl and she bled all over the sheets and he had to burn the sheets. Do I get a towel and put it on the bed to catch the blood? My mom might come home! All of a sudden all of these things went through my head, but I was just so amazed that this was gonna happen. We were pretty much undressed anyways by this point and then I put the condom on. And the stupid fumbling with the condom, and "How does this work?" and your fingers keep slipping off and it was so funny looking back on it but at the time you're just totally nerves. I remember my arms were just shaking and she was kind of

> laying there and I just didn't know exactly where to put it and how to get it in, so she reached down and put it in and then she said, "Okay now go really slow". "Okay". Then I don't even know if it was half-way in, and she said, "Oh, that's it, you gotta take it out, that's just too much!". "Okay" and like it was boom, out, the condom was off, "Are you okay? Are you sure?" and I was so scared for her. I really didn't care much about myself at all, and she said she was fine, it just really hurt. That was pretty much it. (Conversation 1, pp. 10-11)

I was engaged by his spirited storytelling. He continued.

> I remember the next day at school. She said I was treating her differently, and I don't know that I was. She said she'd read in magazines where once guys sleep with a girl, all of a sudden they're cold, they don't care about them anymore. I was goofing around with my guys, I didn't tell anybody about it but I was just with the guys. I don't know if she expected me to just hang out with her, I mean it was a big emotional experience for both of us, but she was very angry the next day because I wasn't as loving as I was supposed to be. I was kind of confused there, but it settled down. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Tam, like Elle, did not define that first penetration as actual intercourse.

> I don't remember the actual first time that we went all the way, the first time. The first penetration, I remember that, but the first time I ejaculated into her I don't remember.
>
> *Do you remember how long after the first halfway penetration was the next time that you, was it a long time?*
>
> I don't think it was a long time. I think at that point we were still fighting around schedules, like, when won't your mom be home, when can you get your brother out of the house? So I know it was after the 3 days, so that she was in her safe zone (*SD: Yeah*) but I don't know how long after that it was. I would have to say that it definitely wasn't more than two weeks, but I don't know exactly how soon. (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Not being able to remember bothered him because it had been such an important time for them.

Their relationship continued and physical sex was a large part of that.

> After 3 years of going out, sex became a very regular thing for us. Whenever I had the house to myself it was, you know, "Come on over, it's time to play!" (Conversation 1, p. 11)

Their relationship appeared "picture perfect" in the high school world.

> We graduated high school. I was the King of the school and she was the Queen of the school - we got voted that by everybody in the school. That was great, it was an amazing feeling, and her father started getting along better with me because we had been going out for so long at this point. We graduated and then we went back for a second year in grade 12. (Conversation 1, p. 13)

This relationship changed when they went to University. They had to grow up and both of them had trouble fitting in new responsibilities with old expectations.

> I came to University, she came to University in Nursing, and she just hated it, couldn't stand it at all. I could understand it because she didn't like school in high school and I didn't know why she was gonna go into nursing in the first place, so she dropped out after 6 months or so. At this point all I kept hearing about was, "Oh, there must be tons of beautiful women near you" and it was getting really stressful on me. I started missing classes just to be with her, and then mom was working so you'd skip school and go home so you could have sex. When we weren't having sex and it was time for me to study we'd have to be together to show that we still loved each other, because at school we were together all of time in high school. Now all of the sudden you're growing up and this is the real way things work. We couldn't really deal with that I don't think. (Conversation 1, p. 13)

In the environment of the University they were not "Tam and Catherine" anymore. It was difficult for them to see themselves as separate.

When Catherine moved out of her parents' home, she expected her new place to become their retreat.

> She dropped out and moved out on her own away from home. At this point, she had it in her head that I was going to be at her place most of the time, we would be having sex all of the time, I would be sleeping over, and then go to school the next day and that wasn't the way it was gonna be. She assumed I'd be over there all the time and I knew that would be a bad mistake because school is important to me. She kept trying to do all these little trick things. I didn't have a vehicle so I had to take the train and it would be, "Well, come on, come on" and try and keep me too late so that I'd miss the last train home and then that would make me mad. I never ended up missing one because at the last second I always said, "Listen, I'm going!" and then the evenings always ended on a bad note. (Conversation 1, pp. 13-14)

In addition to this strain between them, he started hearing stories about guys that were after her. She developed a friendship with a guy whom she had met during her time in Nursing.

> I asked her what she was doing and she said nothing was gonna happen. I said, "I know, but you have to give me my freedom, too, then". She had a big problem with that, it was, "I can't believe you're saying that. I would never do that to you" and I'm like, "Well, if you know that then you know I would never do that to you". "Well, I don't know that", she said. "Why don't you know that?!" She kept going out and she told me about this DJ guy that she'd met now, too, and I was just, "Oh, I can't believe this is happening", but I didn't really think anything was gonna happen, so I just said, "Well, I trust you, so don't make me feel stupid". That was when it really kind of started. (Conversation 1, pp. 13-14)

What had started was the eventual break-up of their relationship. He did not want to believe that at the time.

> We were hitting the point where it was, "I need some time away from you, like obviously we're arguing a lot and I need a week, you know, I don't wanna phone you, you don't phone me, we'll do whatever and I'll talk to you in a week", and then that would go for about 2 days before one of us would break down and phone the other person, so obviously things were still working in our minds. **I loved her, she loved me, there was no way things weren't gonna work out.** (Conversation 1, p. 14)

He was still committed to the idea of a lasting relationship. He knew he was getting a "raw deal" but he was willing to live with it. She called him the night before he was to leave on a week long trip and asked him not to go. She said she did not know what would happen and that they should break up if he went.

> Well, there's no way I'm not going so in my mind I just assumed it was another one of the week apart kind of things, the only difference with this one was that I would actually be gone for a week so we wouldn't be able to talk. By this point, I'd had it with her jealousy for no reason. She thought I wasn't doing enough for her when I was missing school, I was working and not saving money because we'd be spending it on her, or going out. I felt like I was putting out a lot more than I was really capable of doing at the time, so when she said this it was like, "Well, fine, I've noticed pretty girls around and the way that they talk to their boyfriends, and I've talked to friends and I think I'm getting a raw deal here, too, right now, so maybe this would be best" and, for the life of me I still didn't think we were breaking up. (Conversation 1, p. 14)

When he got back from his trip, he assumed everything would be back to normal. He was greeted with some hurtful news.

> I was all happy and I went over to her place, and I had bought her some stuff and I was decked out in my brand new clothes that I just went and bought on my trip. We were kind of talking for awhile and I gave her the stuff, and then we started kissing again. We really didn't talk about anything, I just assumed that things would go back to normal. All of a sudden my hands started roaming and she said, "You may not want to touch me there." She was really quiet and then she said, "Well, I'm not pure anymore" or "I'm tainted" or something to that effect and I was like, "What do you mean?" and she was, "Well, you know that DJ..." I put my head down and it was like someone just sucker-punched me really bad and I had no clue what was happening anymore. I asked, "When did you do this?" and she waited 3 days after I left before she had had sex with another guy. I just went nuts-- I shut up when I get really pissed off. I take everything in, I don't say a word. I just walked out on the balcony and I just stood there. I didn't know what to do, what not to do. I was so mad and so betrayed in a way. I didn't know this was coming, I didn't expect it. I came back in about 5-10 minutes later and she was on the bed and she was crying. I just grabbed my jacket. "I can't stay here anymore," I said, and I just walked out, and she let me

> go. From her place I walked home, which was about a 3 hour walk, and there were so many things I wanted to do. I was just so upset, mad, I wanted to throw things, hit things, yell and scream. (Conversation 1, pp. 14-15)

His sense of stupefaction at her announcement was perceptible. I could imagine him on that three hour trek home.

In spite of the fact that Tam felt betrayed by Catherine, he was not ready to end their relationship. The realization of their break-up was delayed because they continued to have sexual relations.

> I didn't talk to her for about a week and one day I get a phone call, "Do you wanna come over and go for a coffee or something?" "Sure, we might as well talk about it because I'm not gonna throw away 3 years of my life just because of this. I still love you, it's just that I can't go out with you because of what you've done now," and I just felt totally betrayed. We went out and like, "Well, we'll be friends and we'll do things that friends do. We'll still hang out, we're just not going out." "Fine." So meanwhile we ended up having sex. The first time we went to bed, I pulled a condom out. She hates condoms-- "They wreck the mood", she says. I pulled one out and she says, "What's that for?" "Well, you've slept with other people now and I'm not sleeping with you without one of these." Then she got really upset, "Oh, but don't you love me?" It was just, "Forget it. If you're gonna be like that then I'm outta here." So we ended up using it and from then, whenever we met up to be friends, we'd go out as if we're on a friend kind of thing, come back and then we'd have sex. That was screwing me up even more. (Conversation 1, p. 15)

Tam slowly came to the consciousness that their relationship was at an end.

> Meanwhile, within two months, she had slept with six more guys and I found out about this once after we had had sex and I was like, "What?" I don't know, didn't see it coming. I still wasn't talking to girls by this point. Then she started seeing this rich guy and while they were going out we were still having our casual sex. She decided to cut it off between her and I. She said, "No we can't do that anymore. We can be friends, but no more than that," and then I got mad because, "I'm used to having sex with you!" I was confused, really confused at that point. I gave her house key back and she gave my grad ring back and we made the commitment to be friends. (Conversation 1, p. 15)

Tam's approach to their friendship was similar to their love relationship. He tried to make it work.

> I didn't want to lose that time that I spent with her, didn't want to make it seem like it was worth nothing. One day I ended up seeing her boyfriend. I gave him a really open judgment, I wasn't going to hate him because they're going out now. I'd see him in the hallways and then wave, and he'd snuff me every time I saw him. It was driving me up the wall. I couldn't understand why he was doing that to me when he was the guy to come around. I mentioned it to her. She told him I guess, so all of a sudden I get this phone call from her, and she says, "You know, I really can't see you that much because Neil doesn't like it."

> "Well, what does that matter? You're you, I'm me, if he doesn't like it that's his problem." "Well, ya, but..." So this came out, and then I lost it there. "If you're gonna be so immature as to rely on what someone else says you have to do and be such a clingy person..." I know I didn't say enough because I still had all this rage and pent-up feelings inside that I never told her about how she made me feel, about what happened, but I said a bit to her that day and she totally got turned right off. She says, "You can't talk to me that way - nobody talks to me like that," and it was like, "Well, I'm being honest with you and I'm the one person you should be able to listen to and understand," and after that it's just been very scattered kind of thing. (Conversation 1, p. 15)

He could not deny that he still had feelings for her and it took him a long time to deal with those feelings.

> She wanted to make sure that I was okay. It took me a year to get over her as a person. I was still in love with her, still wanted to be with her. It was just an ongoing depression for a long time. She was being nice towards me and I was snuffing her all of the time. Then from there I decided I was being a goof so I changed my attitude towards things and I said, "Okay, well if we're going to be friends, it's obvious that you still kind of care about me, then I'm gonna try and be nice about it." But then all she could ever talk about Neil so then I started to avoid her or I said really stupid things whenever she said something about him. That kinda cut down on our communication. I haven't changed myself the way I deal with her, but lately, she won't talk to close friends now, for some reason. We bumped into her and Neil the other night and she just didn't acknowledge my presence at all, didn't get a "Hello" or anything. So I just walked off, I didn't want to be anywhere near her. It's kind of too bad because I feel bad that it's turned out this way but I'm really not all that worried about it, because I'm past that now, so it's not a big thing. It's just something that you look at and go, "Why?" (Conversation 1, pp. 15-16)

When things did not work out in the end, he was able to come to terms with that. It was like he realized he had done all he could. Although he learned that love would not conquer all, his spirit was not broken. His spirit was, in fact, very much alive.

"Something good's gonna happen because you're a good person"

Tam described having a overall feeling that everything would work out for him. This relates to his philosophy of his relationship with Catherine, but goes much deeper. This thread was very much about himself and how his life experiences have contributed to this attitude. He described himself as identifying at times with the athlete (the cool guy) and the smart guy (the nerd).

As a young boy, Tam had dreams of becoming an athletic star.

> When I was a little kid, we had a garage sale one year, and I had to work it. We were selling a TV and we had to turn it on to make everybody knew that it was working. The Olympics were on this year, so I was sitting there all day watching the Olympics and these guys running and jumping and it was great. I just loved

> the fact that they were doing this for Canada, so I think at that point I told myself, "I'm gonna be on TV, I'm gonna be in the Olympics!" (Conversation 1, p. 2)

His elementary school years went by without too much disturbance in his self image. Then things changed.

> Coming out of grade 6, I had a pretty close group of friends, and then we went to junior high, and I don't know what happened, all of the sudden I was not the person to hang around with. To make themselves look cooler, all of the sudden I became the person that everyone decided to pick on *(SD: Was it at the same time as your parents' separation?*) No, this was just before. My best friend at that point went to a different junior high, and he's still my best friend, because we met back up in high school and stuff. My other close friends at that time went to the same junior high, and to fit it their own way they decided to knock me down a couple pegs, and they started telling stories which were private moments with us kind of thing, and it revealed a lot of personal stuff about me that upset me a lot. I was a really emotional kid, I would cry at the drop of a pin sort of thing, and if I thought someone didn't like me all of the sudden the tears come out. It was really bad for me as a boy to cry a lot and people took advantage of that and really hacked on me for that. My world was really shaken when all of a sudden my best friends turn around and do this so I had nobody, and I was the nerd in the class, really smart, skinny boy, glasses, almost your classic kind of picture of one. Then I started hanging out with some other people and they were kind of the outcasts as well, not really with the in scene or whatever, but they were a good group of people and we were good friends, and I learned a lot of things from them. When grade 8 came around, I played volleyball on the junior team, and I don't how I got on the team, I don't know what we did that year as far as the team goes. But that was kind of the point where people saw me as an athletic person, so an athlete can't be a nerd-- it's just not possible-- so that changed my image a little. (Conversation 1, pp. 6-7)

His image was again improved in grade nine.

> When I went into grade 9 I met this guy in my home room who played basketball and volleyball. He wasn't exactly the cool guy, he played it and he was good at it but nobody really liked him, so he sat beside me and we became locker partners and he knew I was the smart guy, and he said, "Well, come out and try out for these teams." I'd played soccer for about 6, 7 years, so I was coordinated but I had never played it before. "Well, just come out and try", so I went out and tried. I did it more for him because I still wanted him as a friend and then I made the teams and I became a cool person. I totally switched groups, all of a sudden everybody wants to hang out with you or you know these guys therefore you're cool and that totally changed my life, and that was the big turnaround year for me. It felt like we owned the school, but the difference between me and the other guys was that I had been the nerd and I'd been the guy that was picked on and I always remembered that, and I still do to the day. I catch myself doing it sometimes and it, and it hurts me a lot to know that you're doing exactly what other people were doing to you, so for me it's

> conscious effort not to do anything stupid like that. In a way I think that gives me an edge over other people, just because I've seen both sides of it. (Conversation 1, pp. 7-8)

The transition to high school brought Tam back together with this best friend. It also brought him together with his first girlfriend.

> Grade 10 came and I went to that high school because it was smaller and that way I could make the sports teams whereas at the bigger ones I might not have. So I made the teams, I met up with Andrew again, who was my best friend from elementary that went to a different junior high, so he was still friends with Dan which was the guy that had turned on me and started hacking on me. That was not good in my books, but Andrew was still the same guy, so we started hanging out, and we became close again. It was just before the summer when Shaun said, "Well don't you want a girlfriend for the summer?" "I don't know." "Well, think about it, because a girlfriend for the summer would be cool! Then you'd have someone to do stuff with." "I got my friends to do stuff with." "But I know this girl that likes you." "Yeah..." "No, she really likes you!" "Yeah, I don't know" and Shaun's got this thing about him where he says something and just pushes and pushes and doesn't shut up, it's like, "Oh, my God, fine, who is it?" "It's Catherine." Then it was, "Oh she's cute" but I had no clue that she was interested in me at all, and I had even thought of her, of anybody as a girlfriend. It just wasn't in my mind. (Conversation 1, p. 9)

We know the rest of this story. Tam and Catherine ended up being the King and Queen of the school, voted in by their peers. He was the cool guy--he had finally made it.

Although his self-esteem suffered as a result of his break-up with Catherine, his dreams of getting to the Olympics never died.

> I thought I'd get there through volleyball, but my first year I got cut from the team here, so that ended that. And I thought, well, maybe basketball then, so I tried out in my second year for the basketball team, but politics came up and it left me with an ugly taste in my mouth, and I got cut anyways, so that ended that. Then two years of really not doing much of anything--I started rock climbing and that was my big thing for about a year and then just this past year I started Kung Fu which kind of took over from rock climbing, so I've been doing that and putting everything into that. That's going well, but just recently I watched the worlds on TV, and I had heard about Michael Smith a lot and then the whole Olympic experience started to come up again, and it was, "Oh, I have to do something about this, because if I don't do it now then I'll never do it." So I went and talked a coach here, and I talked to him about training for the decathlon. I said, "I really want to try and I need someone to help me and I don't know how to do this, so you're the man I'm looking at," and he said, "Go train with this club guy and we'll see how it goes when tryouts come." So right now, I'm really positive about this whole thing. The fact that I got myself up to go and talk to this guy was kind of a big move 'cause when you think about talking about something you dream of, relying on other people to possibly get you there, and

> just the first step of talking to a guy saying, "I haven't ran for four years at least, will you coach me?" If he's, "No," it could knock you down really hard, and he didn't so that was really good. I'm positive about that right now, so that's a big change so I've got something to motivate me and drive me right now. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

He has come to the point of trusting that everything will turn out for him because it always has. Even though his life right now is not as he expected it would be, he is not worried.

> I'd say five years ago, this what I was imagining--you graduate, you get your job, and I would have probably had a pretty steady relationship by now. I'd always planned on getting married when I was 27 or around there, I didn't want to get married any earlier, and a little later was kind of getting on. I didn't think I'd be rich by now, but I thought that I would be on my way, and I would have broken ground somewhere. Now my view is more like, do what you'd like, I'm gonna go travelling, it's gonna happen, and I won't come back to a steady job or anything, and I'm worried about it but I'm not really worried about it. It's just an overwhelming feeling of something good's gonna happen because you're a good person and you work hard at what you do so you can't really go wrong. (Conversation 1, p. 2)

His comfort with himself and his willingness to share his stories convinced me of his belief in this articulation.

Revealing Himself

Tam spoke to me for two and a half hours about himself and his sexuality. He told me:

> I really think I could be really open with it to anybody. I'm finding a lot of things where there's so much education out there that you could do if you were willing to volunteer your time to do it. I think that I could do it and I'd probably be good at it just 'cause I talk a lot and I think I can talk to anybody. (Conversation 1, p. 20)

At first, it almost seemed he was talking for talking's sake. I came to realize that he was interested in the topic of sexuality and in contributing to research about sexuality. He revealed himself in such detail to provide me with what he thought I wanted. He may have had other reasons for this disclosure but they were not apparent. He offered me his stories as a gift. I accepted them gratefully.

Commonplaces

Connections among the narrations of Elle, Luis, Aurora and Tam were evident throughout my process of inquiry and interpretation. I became aware of three commonplaces that were experienced by all four people. I distinguished two more commonplaces, shared each by two of the participants. I explore these commonplaces in the next sections.

Three Threads

In my interpretation of each conversation I arrived at three narrative threads. I wondered if I identified three threads in each narrative by pure coincidence or by some type of prognostication. I looked carefully at each conversation to see what commonalities they might share. It became obvious. Although I had not asked each person the exact same questions, the questions did follow a specific pattern. We talked about their lives before having intercourse, the situation of their first intercourse, and their feelings and perceptions afterward. It seemed natural that they tell one story about their sexual development or learning, one about their first intercourse, and one about their self-perception. The questions led them in this direction and everyone seemed to follow.

Within this form, each person was unique. Elle talked about becoming herself: the realization that she had to be herself through her first intercourse and her relationship with Jordan. Luis described his model of caring and accentuated his nonidentification with the typical male. Within Aurora's web of meaning, that she was no longer sexual, she described an unresolved guilt about sexual behaviour. Tam revealed himself through his stories and emphasized his belief in himself.

As I stated earlier, I had ambivalent feelings about the fact that I found three threads in each narrative. I have come to view this commonality positively. It indicates to me that our conversations did indeed get at "the significance of first intercourse in young people's lives. I am pleased.

The Second Significance

All of the participants were able to express the meaning that first intercourse held for them but this expression begged another story. Everyone experienced their first time in the context of an ongoing relationship. The second significance that these young men and women spoke of, both explicitly and implicitly, was the importance of their relationship with their first sexual partner.

This importance was most evident in the narrations of Tam. He came the closest to telling *their* story of the relationship, from his side of course. He focused almost equally on Catherine's actions and feelings when he recounted their relationship. He described what the first time meant to *them*, not just him.

Although the significance of the relationship with the sexual partner did not dominate their narrations, this theme was definitely not absent for Elle, Luis and Aurora. Elle spoke with fondness about her then and current relationship with Jordan and how he helped her get over some of her hang-ups about sexuality. Luis talked about the mental and emotional experience of intercourse with someone that he loved. Aurora shared with me how her quick entry into a sexual relationship with Jake carried over into other relationships, at first to get over him.

I noticed something very interesting in the latter stages of my interpretation. The females talked more about the significance of first intercourse and the relationship with this partner in relation to themselves and their self-perceptions. The manner in which Luis and Tam described these significances was almost more romantic, focusing on the sharing of selves. This gender difference may be anomalous to my small sample, but there could be another explanation. I recalled Josselson's (1992) identification of the relational differences between men and women and applied that knowledge to this case. The men focused on the meaning of the situation of first intercourse, of *doing it*, including the woman whom it was with and his feelings for her. They were defining the meaning through the doing. The women focused on their feelings and their understanding of who they were as a result of having sex. The meaning was created by the opinion of their partner and their parents after they had "done it". This subtle, yet important difference deserves further attention. I reflect on gender differences in general in the next chapter.

Knowing and Anticipating

All of the participants had received negative messages about sex and sexuality, yet were somehow looking forward to the experience of first intercourse. This motif was most palpable for Aurora, and emerged as one of her narrative threads. Both Aurora and Elle sensed negativity and disapproval from their mothers and guilt was something they both struggled with for some time. Aurora still feels bad about sex, even in the context of marriage. Luis and Tam were affected by negative messages in a less direct way. Luis came from a Catholic family so he heard the typical messages about masturbation and intercourse but he does not think they really affected his sexuality. Tam was more motivated by knowing that he could get in trouble for doing certain things than by actual adoption of any contemptuous convictions about sexuality. Again, there was a gender difference which could be attributable to the doing and being orientations of men and women as described by Josselson (1992).

Definition of "The First Time"

Elle and Tam shared something other than a deep regard for their first sexual relationship. Both of them described a failed attempt at first intercourse that was "only penetration", not the "real thing". For Elle, the first time happened when they had actually planned for it, complete with condoms and the pill. This seemed to be a preparation for her change in identity from her mother's "little untouched flower" to a nonvirgin. Tam had a different definition-- he had "done it" when he ejaculated into her. This finale indicated to him that he had completed his attempt. The difference between Tam and Elle as man and woman hark back yet again to essential gender differences in relatedness.

Sensitive New Age Guys

Both Tam and Luis were sensitive to the stereotype of the "typical" male. They made it a point to let me know that they did not fit that mold and this arose in a narrative thread for each of them. Luis expressed his exasperation at the tendency of some women to label all men so negatively. Tam focused more on highlighting his more female and gender neutral characteristics. I think this issue came up for two related reasons. The resurgence of feminism has unfortunately sometimes manifested itself as "male bashing". This is most evident in the media, particularly on talk shows. These men grew up during the time of this feminist resurgence and do not enjoy the same security in status that their fathers did. Secondly, they may have assumed that as a female graduate student in a female dominated department I would hold some of these negative opinions of men as well. The appearance of these threads is potentially a sign of the times.

Connecting Our Stories

I did not have to search for commonalities between the conversations I shared with Elle, Luis, Aurora and Tam. Their shared experiences and perceptions were discernible as a part of my initial inquiry and interpretation. With re-interpretation, the commonplaces and the nuance of difference within the commonplaces were revealed.

Could we call these our-stories? This concept, which I introduced in Chapter 2, remains not totally defined for me. I deliberate this further in my closing reflective thoughts.

CHAPTER FIVE

Re-visiting "Narrative"

It's always hard to get started. Just as I initiated this research story, I also begin its completion. Re-visiting the research method and my composed and connected narratives of experience is an effective way to accomplish this. Rather than being a conclusion or ending, this chapter is a space for reflection and discussion. In this way, the culmination of my research is a new beginning.

Explications

Witte (1989) identified two areas for explication in her narrative inquiry; the efficacy of the method and the findings that resulted from the conversations. These two areas emerged from my research as well and I would like to interpret them in turn.

Narrative inquiry was a powerful means for eliciting stories of the significance of first intercourse in young people's lives when young people shared their stories in semi-structured conversations. This method facilitated the intended purpose of my research, which was to increase my understanding of the significance, or life meaning, of first sexual intercourse for young people and to contribute to our limited knowledge about the personal context of youth sexual behaviour. Our conversations gave the four participants permission to talk about their sexuality and their sexual experiences. It also allowed for some processing of their views about sexuality. In sharing their stories with me Elle, Luis, Aurora and Tam appeared to have re-visited the experience of the first time and re-discovered its meaning in their lives. "Personal knowledge was brought from an implicit level of awareness to an explicit level" (Witte, 1989, p. 99) through the use of reflection in the examination of their self-narratives.

Inquiry through semi-structured conversations allowed me to ensure that I was getting at the question yet entitled each man and woman to his or her own voice. I invited them to tell me about themselves and their sexuality, and they did. The evidence that my questions guided the elicitation of personal stories of significance lies in the congruence of the narrative threads in the responses to "Tell me about yourself and your life right now" and the responses to the questions about sexual experiences. Using a narrative style of inquiry revealed that the context surrounding first intercourse (i.e. the relationship with partner, planning for intercourse, where and with whom living) informed the interconnectedness of early sexual experiences, the first time, future sexual relationships, sexual identity and self-esteem.

Narrative writing was ultimately a means for self-discovery and reflection. I felt the power of this research as I read and re-read my own and the participants' stories. I re-discovered the meaning of first intercourse and sexuality in my own life. I do not believe that any other method encourages this depth of introspection. Hearing and listening to my own stories has become a way to nourish, encourage and sustain myself (Howe, 1984 in Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

In addition to the effectiveness of the method of narrative inquiry, I uncovered a web of connection between early sexual experiences, the first time, future sexual relationships, sexual identity and self-esteem. Luis and Aurora tell the story of how the rest of their lives influenced first intercourse and their other sexual experiences rather than the other way around. Elle and Tam spoke more about the influence of their relationship with their first sexual partner on the rest of their lives. Why was I surprised? Did my question suggest a one way relationship between first intercourse and life? In its phrasing, I think it may seem that way. When I re-evaluate the meaning of significance I see that this discovery is not inharmonious. We are weaving a web of meaning, not stretching a tightrope of causality. Meaning suggests interconnections, interrelationships, complexity. Stories mean more than they can say with words. They cannot be separated from life. The implicit meaning of life and life events are made explicit in stories.

Discussion

What About the Space?

I have made reference to the space between men and women--the difference in their styles of relatedness--throughout this thesis. Although I started out with an intent to avoid focusing on gender issues, these issues were presented to me by others early on in my research journey. I decided to include men in my study despite concerns about my safety and my ability to understand their stories. As I explored stories of the first time, I was unable to ignore the differences between men's and women's narrations. I struggled to identify with the men's stories. I encountered similar difficulties in my conversations with men. Although I could understand their stories, I had not lived them. A window was being opened for me, as well as for readers of my research, however the view was far from clear.

There is a space between us. The question is: How much attention should we pay to it? It is fruitless to emphasize the differences between men and women for the sake of proving we are different. When our differences shed light on our actions, feelings or the meanings we hold for events in our lives, we must acknowledge them. We must also realize that there is as much within-gender variation as there is between-gender variation. The key is to focus on each *person's* story. Being a man or a woman may indeed be a dominant theme of that story, but one should not stop there. Gender is a beginning place--it provides a context for our stories.

Sexual Meanings

"The first time" has been commonly understood to mean first sexual intercourse for at least the past 20 years. This is evident both in the publications on the subject and the tacit use of the term by the men and women in all of our conversations. There is no doubt about which first time we are referring to. The first intercourse and the first time were understood universally by the participants in this study to mean penile-vaginal intercourse, although I did not implicitly say that. Montpetit (1995a) defines the first time more loosely as a significant step in one's sexual awakening. If I had defined the first time in this way for my participants or if had asked them about their "sexual initiation" (Thompson, 1990) what might they have said?

The focus on physical sexuality that I criticized in the literature was evident in my questions in the conversation guide as well as in the participants' responses. I encouraged them to talk about their sexuality, which they all focused on as sexual behaviour. Not one of these young men and women talked about the development of their sexual self-esteem in any real depth until the point they described becoming sexually active. Luis actually went to the extent of saying that nothing had really impacted his sexuality. In our society there is a denial that we are sexual beings until a socially acceptable time for sexual behaviour. Does this cause us to suppress childhood memories of sexual thoughts and feelings? Our sexual feelings are not validated as children and young adolescents because of the fear that validation would mean approval of acting on those feelings. The fact that these stories do not exist tells another story about the meanings that sex and sexuality have for young people.

In Search of Our-story

In Chapter Two, I talked about our-story as being the shared stories or commonplaces of the experience of first intercourse. There is the possibility of another our-story, a story authored by *both* participants in the shared experience. Are there any such stories available? How might we capture one? Can such a thing even exist?

Vaines (1996) and others talk about the existence of family narratives. It seems that these family narratives are generated through conversations and journal writing. One might criticize that a family story is little more that the gathered stories of all of the family members. Similarly, would the conversation of a couple about the significance of a particular sexual event in their lives truly be a story about them or about the each of them? Each member of the couple could tell their own our-story of their sexual relationship. Another possibility for our-story could be a common story told by couples. A few come to mind; the night we met, our first date, wedding planning woes, in-laws from hell. Perhaps the differences between what each partner says, the points of disagreement, are part of the story. Stories, like the lives they reflect, are complex and messy.

Further Research

Throughout the process of narrative inquiry and interpretation, I have encountered opportunities for further research into the life significance and meaning of first intercourse to young men and women. I would like to highlight three in particular.

It would be enlightening to gather the stories of people who experienced first intercourse at a young age (i.e. 12 to 15 years). Everyone in this study experienced their first time in their late teens. The stories of younger adolescents may reveal different meanings and connections. Knowledge of the personal meanings attached to intercourse at an early age may provide insight into educating adolescents about the risks and realities of early intercourse.

The exploration of our-stories of sexual experience is a worthy endeavor. This type of conversation would be much different than in a therapeutic session. Several questions arise. Would it have had to have been the first time for both partners? Would it be desirable to record the conversations of couples who were still sexually involved? Would the researcher guide the conversation or allow the couple to explore the issue in a less structured setting? The possibility for this type of research is an exciting prospect. Given that sex is often treated as if it were an individual activity, its exploration in context would be a welcome contribution to the study of both sexuality and close relationships. Narrative research would provide context for the sexual meaning systems of couples currently being explored by Maddock and his colleagues. While this group is measuring sexual meaning on semantic differentials with the stimulus term of "sex", another source for exploring this concept would be the conversations of couples about their sexual lives together. In this way, we may discover shared sexual meanings as directly expressed by the couple, rather than by their compared individual responses to a paper and pencil measure.

There is also a need to further explore the contexts of first intercourse and subsequent sexual activity. In their stories Elle, Luis, Aurora and Tam described in more and less overt ways how they felt family relationships, other relationships, situational factors and life events had influenced their first intercourse and following sexual relationships. These stories indicate the centrality of *context* for looking at the meaning or significance of life events. My study could be furthered in conversations that are more circular or spiraling in nature--whereas my probing questions followed a more chronological or developmental order, further questions could reach back and forth in time and development to allow storytellers to inform our understanding of context for sexual events. Contexts may differ for young people from different locations within Alberta, within Canada and globally. This would be an enlightening extension of what I have started in this study.

Implications

Narratives of the significance of first intercourse hold valuable information for educators, health care and social service providers, parents and young people. The importance of a strong sense of self for making healthy sexual decisions is obvious, especially for young women. The stories of Elle and Aurora illustrate the influence sexual identity and self-esteem on sexual choices and behaviours. Elle, who had the silent approval of her father and the encouragement to make her own decisions, was "not going to settle" for a relationship where she would become too emotionally involved through sex and get hurt. Aurora's feelings that sex was her duty as a girlfriend and a wife and reinforced messages that sex was bad have contributed to her loss of sexual identity. The men's stories are valuable as well. Tam and Luis' stories challenge assumptions that young men are unemotional about their sexual partners. They *were experiencing it with* a partner rather than *doing it*. Their stories also reinforce that the context of sexuality and sexual behaviour for men, as well as women, includes such situations as relationships with parents, peers and partners; societal norms; and available "texts" about sexuality and sexual expression. Most profoundly, these narratives portray the power of personal story. Deepened understanding of the meaning behind adolescents' and young adults' sexual behaviour provides professionals and parents with a stronger base for education than average ages of first intercourse. It's time that we started really listening to the voices of young people: not just what they say, but the stories behind what they say.

This research has two important implications for sexuality educators. Firstly, it has implications on curricula for sexuality education. The centrality of context for sexual behaviour and meanings attached to that behaviour indicates that programs cannot be one-pronged in their approach. Sexual behaviour occurs in a complex environment. Telling young people to avoid intercourse without taking into account their relationships with their parents, the influence of their friends, their emotional connection to their partner, and their views on sexuality, sexual expression and love has failed to produce the desired effect. Curricula must take the whole person and his or her experience into consideration. Young people need access to the stories of people like Elle, Aurora, Luis and Tam to help them understand sexuality in their own lives. This means that curricula must go beyond "plumbing" to the personal. The second implication of this research for sexuality education relates to delivery. Narrative inquiry was a powerful approach for self-discovery for both my participants and myself. Educators could incorporate narrative into the classroom, most effectively with journals. Students could keep personal journals as a tool for discovering and listening to their own stories.

Implementing curricula with personal content and utilizing narrative method would not be an easy endeavor. A combination of personality, knowledge and experience is needed to effectively implement narrative method in the sexuality education classroom. This style of teaching, in which you have to confront yourself and your views about sexuality, involves much more personal risk than hiding behind facts and figures, and demands something that many people are afraid to offer. A good educator must be willing to make some personal investments. Educators could not implement narrative without some knowledge of the theory behind the method and personal experience with the method. This has implications for teacher preparation. Reflection is already emphasized as an important component of teaching. Narrative and storytelling could be presented as mediums for reflection and self-discovery. In fact, the Centre for Research in Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta focusses on narrative method. A considerable amount of research has been done in this area, revealing the power of narrative for teachers and their students (see for example Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Huber, 1992; Szojka, 1994). Narrative should be presented as a learning tool in addition to discussion and hands-on activities. Exploration of the philosophy behind narrative could be included in courses on educational foundations and educational psychology. In addition to these intrapersonal risks, an adoptee of narrative method in sexuality education may face criticism and disapproval. Parents may react quite negatively to the sexual content of personal narratives about sexuality. My encounters with stereotypes and negative attitudes toward the study of sex and sexuality in the academic environment are a complement to the conservative and sometimes narrow-minded views of stakeholders in this province's education system. The community must be made aware of the benefits of a narrative approach. Educators can learn from and teach within a narrative framework if support is available for them within the administration and the community.

This research has similar implications for health care and social service providers. Narrative can be used in the health care or social service settings as well. Educational materials (brochures, booklets) for clients or patients can focus on personal stories as the educational tool. Young people would be more likely to "listen" to their peers than an adult. Focussing on the personal also indicates a sensitivity to the experiences of the young people using the service, which may be a sexual assault centre or a sexually transmitted disease clinic. In terms of practice, professionals who work with young people must keep in mind the whole person they are serving, not just the symptoms they see. When consulting with clients or patients, professionals must listen to the stories that young people are telling them. These stories and the contexts surrounding them might be better elicited by asking young people to "tell me about what happened..." rather than more closed-ended questions. This of course requires sensitivity and judgment about how far to probe. Keeping this in mind, the use of narrative in service settings would only improve service providers' understanding of their clients' experiences and problems.

The power of personal story, which was so profoundly illustrated through this study, is worthy of consideration for parents of young people. Although relations between young people and their parents may be strained, parents still play a very important role in young people's lives. By sharing their stories with their children parents can communicate their values more effectively than in a lecture or scolding. I feel that most young people would welcome the opportunity to know their parents in this way--both Elle and Aurora were frustrated with way their mothers communicated with them about sexuality. Elle explained that as she and her mother communicated more honestly with one another about her mother's relationship with her father she felt a strengthened relationship. Aurora, on the other hand, was still confused by the context-less messages of her mother. The impact of negative communication about sexuality is most acutely portrayed in her case. Story sharing would be difficult and almost impossible for some parents. Parents do not have to share intimate stories about their sexual lives to give their children a context for their sexual attitudes and beliefs. They may share more general stories that touch on the themes of love, sexuality and family life. It is important that they create opportunities for their children to know them in the same way that they live--through stories. It is also important that children know that we all experience vulnerability, fear, happiness, guilt and uncertainty.

Ultimately, it is young men and women who should experience the implications of this research. The stories of Elle, Aurora, Luis and Tam expose underrepresented texts about youth sexuality. Elle's assertion that she was not going to settle for just anyone or any relationship is a powerful one for young women. She is not a prude, she is being true to herself and her values. Aurora's stories reveal the darker side of sexual involvement--she started out by having intercourse because she felt she had to. This, combined with other situations and factors in her life, contributed to her negative self-esteem and negative view of her own sexuality. Tam and Luis' stories provide us with a view that has not been afforded in the past. Where can men find stories that speak of the emotional connectedness they experience with a sexual partner? Certainly not in Playboy or Penthouse. Men do not have access to the plethora of personal experience stories to which women do. Making these stories accessible to young men might give them permission to begin telling and listening to their own stories. Tam's stories about his respect for women, sexuality and relationships are validating for men who do not want to live the macho story. Luis, as well, rejected the notion of the typical male and talked about his more androgynous identification. Instead of being about bravado, these stories are about feelings. The "peer pressure" provided by these stories could be very positive.

It is my hope that I can effectively communicate my deepened understanding of the significance of first intercourse in young people's lives and the utility of narrative method. I can do this as a researcher through publishing articles and presenting at conferences. As an educator, it is my responsibility to apply this understanding to my own practice and share my understanding with my colleagues. I can do this through informal means or more explicit approaches, like educational resources or workshops for teachers. As a volunteer service provider at a sexual assault centre, I must always keep in mind the person who has experienced the trauma and listen to his or her stories. I can also keep in mind that personal stories may be effective for both those who have experienced sexual assault and those who wish to learn more about sexual assault. This would mean ensuring there are resources available for clients that balance story and sensitivity. As a future parent, I can continue to incorporate story sharing in my relationships with my partner and others. As I will be the main instrument for communicating my understanding, and as I feel this understanding is important and significant, it is my responsibility through my multiple roles to apply and communicate this understanding.

Revisiting My Story

Why did I choose to use the metaphor of Aphrodite to tell about my sexual beginnings? The Aphrodite archetype provided a vehicle for telling my story. It allowed me to talk about myself in a structured way. Because I was focussing on my sexuality, I wrote in the beginning about the perception of Aphrodite as sexual. As I revisit this story, I realize its limitations. It is time for some re-writing.

In the first chapter, I said that I rediscovered my relationship with the Goddess of Beauty and Love. It is interesting that both Aphrodite and sexuality suffer from the same affliction--the stereotype that they are focussed on sexual behaviour. After I described myself as recognizing aspects of this archetype within myself, I wondered what I was really saying about myself. I contemplated whether I wanted to reveal this "skeleton". Why did I connect to such a disaffirming image? There is a general shortage of positive images and scripts about sexuality available to us, scripts that would validate *all* parts of our selves. I almost decided to write my connection with the Aphrodite image out of my story, but I realized that not including it would be wrong. "I have to go with who I am," in the words of Elle. Although this story does not tell about all of me, it is about part of me, and I cannot deny that.

What intrigued me about Shinoda Bolen's (1984) depiction of Aphrodite was the development of her character as a woman who "valued emotional experience with others" (p. 224). She also describes Aphrodite as a vision carrier, "under whom others bloom and develop" (p. 231). Aphrodite was more than a sexual object, and so am I. I am the teacher, the helper, the creator. This is the self that I emphasize. My sexual beginnings clouded that self for awhile, but it has always been at my centre.

Aphrodite's image, rather than her character, was transformed for me. I underwent a transformation of my self image throughout my research and personal journey. I made the decision to take control of my life and listen to myself. I would be naive to say that I totally understand this metamorphosis, but as I visit and re-visit my cave I become more sure of who I am. I am reminded of the proverb about giving children both roots and wings. I have decided to spread my wings and fly. The ground will always be there below me.

References

Belenky, M., Clenchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1986). Women's ways of knowing. New York: Basic Books.

Blakeslee, M. (1995). Bump and grind. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 1, (pp. 51-66). Victoria: Orca.

Bouris, K. (1993). The first time. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.

Bouris, K. (1994). The first time: What parents and teenage girls should know about "losing your virginity". Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.

Brick, P. (1989). Toward a positive approach to adolescent sexuality. SIECUS Report, 17(5), 1-3.

Brissett, L. (1995). Innocence and passion. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 41-52).

Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. Social Research, 54(1), 11-32.

Bruner, J. (1990). Acts of meaning. London: Harvard University.

Carroll, J, Volk, K., & Hyde, J. (1985). Differences between males and females in motives for engaging in sexual intercourse. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 14, 131-139.

Christopher, F., & Cate, R. (1984). Factors involved in premarital sexual decision-making. Journal of Sex Research, 20, 363-376.

Christopher, F. & Cate, R. (1985). Anticipated influences on sexual decision-making for first intercourse. Family Relations, 34, 265-270.

Clandinin, J., & Connelly, M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research, (pp. 413-427). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Connelly, M. & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Connelly, M., & Clandinin, J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. Educational Researcher, 19(5), 2-14.

Cooper, J. (1991). Telling our own stories: The reading and writing of journals. In C. Witherell and N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education, (pp. 96-112). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Darling, C., Davidson, K., & Passarello, L. (1992). The mystique of first intercourse among college youth: The role of partners, contraceptive practices, and psychological reactions. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 21, 97-117.

DeLamater, J. (1987). Gender differences in sex scenarios. In K. Kelley (Ed.), Females, males, and sexuality: Theories and research, (pp. 127-139). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Doyle, B. (1995). Recorder lesson. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 3-11). Victoria: Orca.

Field, P., & Morse, J. (1985). Nursing research: The application of qualitative approaches. Rockville, MD: Aspen.

Fleming, K. & Fleming, A. T. (1975). The first time. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Glass, S., & Wright, T. (1992). Justifications for extramarital relationships: The association between attitudes, behavior, and gender. Journal of Sex Research, 29, 361-387.

Godfrey, M. (1995). You owe me a Big Mac. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 1, (pp. 33-48). Victoria: Orca.

Grumet, M. (1988). Bitter milk: Women and teaching. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research, (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hass, A. (1979). Teenage sexuality. New York: Macmillan.

Huber, J. (1992). Narratives of experience: Voice as evaluation. Unpublished master's thesis, Department of Elementary Education, University of Alberta.

Johnson, J. (1990). Selecting ethnographic informants. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Josselson, R. (1992). The space between us: Exploring the dimensions of human relationships. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Juhasz, A. (1975). Sexual decision-making: The crux of the adolescent problem. In R. Grinder (Ed.), Studies in adolescence (3rd ed.). London: Collier Macmillan.

Julien, D., Bouchard, C., Gagnon, M., & Pomerleau, A. (1992). Insiders' views of marital sex: A dyadic analysis. Journal of Sex Research, 29, 343-360.

Kelley, K. (1979). Socialization factors in contraceptive attitudes: Roles of affective responses, parental attitudes, and sexual experience. Journal of Sex Research, 15, 6-20.

Kessler, D. (1995). Did I or didn't I? In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 1, (pp. 95-101). Victoria: Orca.

Kinsella, W. P. (1995). The clothesline door. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 55-62). Victoria: Orca.

Lally, C., & Maddock, J. (1994). Sexual meaning systems of engaged couples. Family Relations, 43, 53-60.

Lawson, J. (1995). So tell me. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 111-124).

Leigh, B. (1989). Reasons for having and avoiding sex: Gender, sexual orientation, and relationship to sexual behavior. Journal of Sex Research, 26, 199-209.

Maddock, J. (1988, November). The sexual meaning scales: Development of a semantic differential. Paper presented at the 1989 annual conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Philadelphia, PA.

Montpetit, C. (Ed.). (1995a). The first time: True stories. Volume 1. Victoria: Orca.

Montpetit, C. (Ed.). (1995b). The first time: True stories. Volume 2. Victoria: Orca.

Montpetit, C. (1995c). White on white. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 87-108). Victoria: Orca.

Morse, J. (1991). Strategies for sampling. In J. Morse (Ed.), Qualitative nursing research: A contemporary dialogue, (pp. 127-145). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Phillips, G. (1986). Men talking to men about their relationships with women. American Behavioral Scientist, 29, 342-366.

Romberger, B. V. (1986). "Aunt Sophie always said...": Oral histories of the commonplaces women learned about relating to men. American Behavioral Scientist, 29, 342-367.

Rosenthal, G. (1993). Reconstruction of life stories: Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews. In R. Josselson and A. Lieblich (Eds.), The narrative study of lives: Volume 1, (pp. 58-91). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Rubin, L. B. (1991). Erotic wars: What happened to the sexual revolution? New York: Harper Perennial.

Sarbin, T. (Ed). (1986). Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct. New York: Praeger.

Schwartz, I. (1993). Affective reactions of American and Swedish women to their first premarital coitus: A cross-cultural comparison. Journal of Sex Research, 30, 18-26.

Shinoda Bolen, J. (1984). Goddesses in everywoman: A new psychology of women. New York: Harper & Row.

Sprecher, S., Barbee, B., & Schwarz, P. (1995). "Was it good for you, too?": Gender differences in the experience of first intercourse. Journal of Sex Research, 32, 321-335.

Stephens, M. (1995). Borders. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 2, (pp. 65-70). Victoria: Orca.

Swede, G. (1995). It's always the first time. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 1, (pp. 69-82).

Szojka, S. (1994). Teachers and their personal professional visions. Unpublished master's thesis, Department of Elementary Education, University of Alberta.

Thompson, S. (1990). Putting a big thing into a little hole: Teenage girls' accounts of sexual initiation. Journal of Sex Research, 27, 341-361.

Vaines, E. (1996). Handouts obtained from D. Kieren.

Valenta, L. (1995). My own story. In C. Montpetit (Ed.), The first time: True stories. Volume 1, (pp. 109-128). Victoria: Orca.

Weis, D. (1983). Affective reactions of women to their initial experience of coitus. Journal of Sex Research, 19, 209-237.

Whitley, B. (1988, August). College students' reasons for sexual intercourse: A sex role perspective. Paper presented at the 96th annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Atlanta.

Widdershoven, G. A. (1993). The story of life: Hermeneutic perspectives on the relationship between narrative and life history. In R. Josselson and A. Lieblich (Eds.), The narrative study of lives: Volume 1, (pp. 1-20). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Witherell, C., & Noddings, N. (1991). Stories lives tell. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Witte, D. (1989). Adult memories of childhood play experiences: Emergence of metaphoric themes. Unpublished master's thesis, Department of Elementary Education, University of Alberta.

APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Text for Classroom Presentation

I am conducting a study for my thesis research about the significance of first sexual intercourse in young men's and women's lives. I will interview young men and women, aged 18 - 30, in the next two months. I will ask some general questions to each participant in which I will get to know a bit more about their lives. I will proceed to asking questions about sexuality, ranging from childhood experiences to expectations and realities of first sexual intercourse.

I will be distributing/have distributed an information slip to each one of you for your consideration. If you are interested in participating, please call me at the number on the slip. All inquiries will be confidential. If you leave a message on the answering machine at this number, please note that only I will have access to this machine. If you decide to participate you will be interviewed 1-2 times. The first interview would last about one hour and the second would be about a half hour. All of your inquiries may not result in an interview, but I will make every attempt to include you in the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from some of you soon.

Handout to Accompany Presentation

~What Is The Significance of First Intercourse in Young People's Lives?~

I would like to hear the stories of young men and women about the role the "first time" has played in their lives. If you are between 18 and 30 years of age, please call Sandra Dika in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta at 492-5141 to find out more about becoming a participant. All inquiries will be confidential.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Project Title:	The Significance of First Intercourse in the Lives of Youth
Researcher:	Sandra Dika Graduate Student Dept. of Human Ecology University of Alberta 3-38 Assiniboia Hall 492-5141
Thesis Supervisor:	Dr. Dianne Kieren Professor of Human Ecology University of Alberta 3-38 Assiniboia Hall 492-5770

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of first intercourse and find out what significance it has in people's lives. It is hoped that learning more about the meaning of first intercourse will increase understanding about personal context of sexuality and contribute to education efforts for healthy sexuality.

Your participation in the study will involve the following:

- You will be interviewed 1-2 times. The first interview will take about an hour while the second would be much shorter, about a half hour.
- The interviews will be arranged at a time and place that is suitable for you.
- All interviews will be tape recorded.

I will listen to the tapes and type out what was said. The only people who will see these typed pages will be myself and my thesis committee (Dr. Dianne Kieren, Dr. Maryanne Doherty-Poirier, and Dr. Julia Ellis). None of these people will share the information you have provided with anyone. Your name will not be on the typed interviews and a code number will be used instead. The tapes and the typed copies of the interviews will be kept in a locked cupboard to which only I have a key. In order to protect your identity, these forms will be stored in a locked cupboard separate from the typed copies and the tapes. The tapes and the forms will be destroyed immediately after the research is completed.

The information you provide may be written up in a thesis, report, article, or presented at a conference. These writings may contain some of your words but will not contain your name or any other information that could identify you. The reports will not include the names of any other people whom you talk about in the interview unless you so wish.

Participation in this study is **your choice** and you have the following rights:

- You can stop the interview at any time.
- You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time.
- You may refuse to answer any question.
- You may withdraw any information that you have given at any time.

- You can contact the researcher or her supervisor at any time with questions or concerns about the research.

This is to certify that I (print your name) ______________________________ agree to participate as a volunteer in this study. I am aware of the purpose of the study and that I will participate in two interviews taking about 1 1/2 hours in total. I am aware that all of my interviews with the researcher will be recorded and transcribed but that this information will be kept confidential by removing all information that could identify me. All of my questions and concerns to date have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to stop participating in the study at any time. I realize that if I disclose any information about the abuse of a child the researcher will have to report it to the authorities, but that all other information will be kept strictly confidential. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant (put your signature here): ______________________

Researcher's signature: ______________________

Date: ______________________

****

I would like receive a summary of the study when it is finished.

Name: ____

Address: ______________________________________

Referral Resources

Dr. Colleen MacDougall, Chartered Psychologist
482-7515

Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic
427-2834

Sexual Assault Centre

University of Alberta	492-9771
Downtown Edmonton	423-4121

Student Counselling Services
492-5205

APPENDIX C

Conversation Guide

1. Tell me something about your life right now: any recent changes in your life? How does it compare to your life five years ago?

2. Tell me about your personality/character. If you were to tell yourself who you really are, how would you do that? How do you vs. others describe yourself?

3. What does being fe/male mean to you? - being a wo/man?

4. Tell me how you learned about yourself, feeling good about your body, sexual thoughts, sexual play.

5. Could you relate some significant experiences in your childhood that have had an impact on your development as a sexual person?

6. Why are these incidents meaningful to you?

7. What was your life like in your adolescent years? How did you become more sexually active (trying different sexual behaviours, feeling sexual, sexual thoughts)?

8. Tell me about the situation leading up to and including your first intercourse. How long did your relationship with this person last? How long until you had sex again with this person? What was the role of physical sex/intercourse in that relationship?

9. What were some of your expectations about first intercourse? How did you develop some of these expectations? Who or what influenced them?

10. What was your perception of your first intercourse then? Now? Has your perception changed over time and if so what led to these changes?

11. How have your perceptions of your first intercourse affected you in sexual relationships? How long until you were sexual with another partner? Role of physical sex/intercourse in subsequent relationships?

12. What role has first intercourse played in your life? Have your perceptions of yourself changed? Your perceptions about your sexuality? Where are you at right now?

13. If you were to describe the significance of first intercourse in your life how would you do that? Who would you share it with? How would you tell it differently to a parent? friend? partner?

14. We've been talking about your experience so far - is there some other way you could express it?